ISIS & Eschatology: Apocalyptic Motivations Behind the Formation and Development of the Islamic State

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ISIS & ESCHATOLOGY:
APOCALYPTIC MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE FORMATION AND
DEVELOPMENT OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

A Thesis
Presented to
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Master of Arts

By
Matthew Musselwhite

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ISIS & ESCHATOLOGY:
APOCALYPTIC MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE FORMATION AND
DEVELOPMENT OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Vicki Freihaut and Donald Musselwhite, who have been my biggest supporters in all that I do. Without their continuous love and support, none of this would have been possible.
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Whereas the goal of my thesis was to analyze the Islamic State’s apocalyptic nature by studying both classic Islamic eschatology and the Islamic State’s online magazine Dabiq. In order to conduct this research, I separated my thesis into two separate angles of approach. The first angle (chapters one & two) exclusively looked at Islamic eschatology, classic apocalyptic texts, shifts in how literature was written over time, and on examples of modern messianic revolutions occurring. In this way, I attempted to emphasize how extra-Qur’anic texts have played a large part in providing details for what Islamic eschatology entails. I also looked at modern examples of messianic movements, including in Mecca and Sudan. I concluded by analyzing the shift modern apocalyptic literature underwent beginning in the late 20th century. This highlighted how apocalyptic literature stated focusing on the actions of Western forces—much like the Islamic State has done today.

The second angle of approach derived from the final chapters. I looked at the foundation and development of the Islamic State beginning in the early 21st century with Al-Qaeda in Iraq. I proceeded to emphasize how messianic speculation influenced the actions and strategies of Islamic State in Iraq and later ISIS. The final chapter, the crux of my thesis, was an analysis of the Islamic State’s written primary source, Dabiq. I researched all thirteen issues of the magazine for evidence of apocalyptic nature existing.
I highlighted how *Dabiq* is filled with apocalyptic references and classic apocalyptic hadiths.

The objective of this thesis was to provide a multifaceted analysis of the Islamic State. It attempted to approach the Islamic State from two different angles to show why apocalyptic thought first arises, how it has led to revolution, and how the Islamic State mirrors those cases. With the Islamic State, a wide variety of interpretations have formed on what it wants and what it is fighting for. Whereas religious motivation has often been dismissed, I used this thesis to emphasize that both religious and apocalyptic motivation have been one of many influences behind the formation and development of the Islamic State.
Introduction

On August 19, 2014, the nation watched in horror as a man with a British accent, dressed in black, threatened President Obama and the American military for its recent bombings in Iraq and then, in “retaliation” beheaded the American hostage James Foley. That man, given the title of “Jihadi John,” was later identified as Mohammad Emwazi and has since been killed in a drone strike. In-between his threats and the execution of Foley, Emwazi emphasized that an established Islamic caliphate had been accepted by a “large amount of Muslims.” While the media latched onto the actions conducted in the video, it was Emwazi’s choice of words that caught the attention of jihadists and the scholars who study them—as he had meant to convey a specific message. An Islamic caliphate had been established and any aggression against this caliphate from the United States would result in warfare. For the first time, Western media and the American public were introduced to the profoundly violent, apocalyptically inspired, Islamic militancy calling themselves the Islamic State.

This declaration of the caliphate, a political-theological idea traced back to early Islamic history, is an important first step to understanding ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria)¹ as a distinct terrorist organization. The announcement of the caliphate in 2014 marks a pivotal moment in history for jihadists, scholars, and the American government alike. With the declaration of a caliphate, ISIS and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi began to demand bay’ah (oath of loyalty or allegiance) from every Muslim and all terrorist

¹ Originally named ISI, Islamic State in Iraq, the group has recently been called by a variety of other names after gaining territory in Syria. They are often referred to as ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant), IS (Islamic State), or more recently in an effort to disclaim their legitimacy they have been given the title of Daesh in Arabic. For the sake of clarity, I will stick to identifying them as either the Islamic State or ISIS. To create a separation in the timeline, any information after 2013 will refer to the group as ISIS or the Islamic State.
organizations, including from Al-Qaeda and its current leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.² It will remain unknown how significant of an impact this declaration of a caliphate will have on jihadist militancy and American foreign policy in the years to come. Yet at the moment, it appears that global attention has shifted from Zawahiri’s Al-Qaeda to al-Baghdadi’s caliphate—a place claiming to be open “to all Muslims.”

One of ISIS’s characterizing features—distinguishing it from Al-Qaeda, in particular—is its emphasis on apocalyptic theology. This theology appears to be rich in reinterpretations of the use of jihad, the purpose of fitna (civil strife or war amongst Sunni and Shi’a Muslims), the purification of Islamic lands, and the role Muslims are to play during events leading to the Final Hour—in which the Great War or al-Malhamah al-Kubra will take place prior to the Day of Judgment.³ While ISIS is not the first or only Islamic movement to advocate violence through reinterpretation of Islamic eschatology, its end time vision of the world remains a serious component in understanding its thought process, strategies, global appeal, and thus should not be so easily dismissed.

To better understand ISIS, we ought to investigate and take seriously the apocalyptic narrative that it has constructed and appears to be influenced by. Therefore, I argue that the Islamic State’s apocalyptic theology remains central in understanding a number of its characteristics—how it began, how it interprets the use of force, its rampant killing of Sunni and Shi’a tribes, its appeal to foreigner fighters, and why it is that the Islamic State seeks to “govern” territory through a strict interpretation of Shari’a Law. In this way, my

³ David Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic. (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2002.), 21. This term roughly translates to “Armageddon” according to most sources, though the phrase akhir al-zaman (end of times) is also used in place of it in some sources. Using David Cook’s definition of Malhamah, the term translates as “a specific type of apocalyptic battle within the genre of fitan.”
thesis presents an additional lens for understanding the Islamic State. It does so while acknowledging that other academic approaches (including political, social, and economic analyses) also have much to contribute in wider discussion of the Islamic State’s nature.

This thesis, however, will exclusively focus on the Islamic State’s apocalyptic theology, religious motivations, and how both seem to be influencing the group’s formation and ongoing development. By using this particular method of approach, I will demonstrate how this component (among others) can provide a multifaceted understanding of ISIS—that to this point has been nonexistent or easily dismissed. I recognize no single approach is more “correct” than the next, but dismissing religious factors and motivation may further stunt a wider understanding for what ISIS is pursuing and fighting to achieve.

Interestingly, this method of analysis (so far) has appeared to have been glossed over and dismissed by scholars and government officials alike. Rarely has the Islamic State’s apocalyptic nature been treated as an important feature of understanding the group’s motivations and actions. The exception to this has come from Graeme Wood’s Atlantic article What ISIS Really Wants and more recently from William McCants The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State. Wood’s article, however, resulted in an immediate and global backlash after being published online in early 2015. The criticism that Wood received seems to have been a result from his argument that the Islamic State was religiously and apocalyptically motivated. He began his article stating “The Islamic State is no mere collection of psychopaths. It is a religious group with carefully considered beliefs, among them that it is a key agent of the

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4 It is within these two texts that I first began to take serious the benefits of analyzing the Islamic State through an apocalyptic lens, and I owe much of my analysis to the work conducted by these two scholars.
coming apocalypse.” Wood would go on to support this claim by arguing that Islamic eschatology (and the events detailed inside it) have remained at the forefront of ISIS’s pursuit of establishing a caliphate, and that they should not be so easily overlooked as just political or nationalistic aspirations disguised as in religious clothing.

With this analysis, Wood also critiques scholars who have tended to dismiss religion from being a serious motivating factor in the pursuits of terrorist organizations such as ISIS. Wood states that dismissing religious motivation entirely has tended to lead scholars and Western government officials to both misunderstand “the nature of the Islamic State.”

This misinterpretation, according to Wood, has been a result from approaching the Islamic State from what he terms as a “monolithic” methodology in studying terrorist organizations. Wood posits that since Al-Qaeda (the most notable terrorist organization) fought for “specific political concessions, such as the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Saudi Arabia,” those viewing ISIS today have also been led “to rehearse this observation—that jihadists are modern secular people, with modern political concerns, wearing medieval religious disguise—and [then] make it fit the Islamic State.” This “monolithic” approach is a direct result from refusing to take the Islamic State at its word of being religiously motivated, a refusal to examine its literature as possibly apocalyptic, and a refusal to analyze the Islamic State as a separate entity from Al-Qaeda—with separate aspirations and agendas.

Wood concludes his piece by stating, “Muslims can reject the Islamic State; nearly all

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5 Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants." *The Atlantic.* (February 16, 2015.)
do. But pretending that it isn’t actually a religious, millenarian group, with theology that
must be understood to be combatted, has already led the United States to underestimate it
and back foolish schemes to counter it.”

It would be from this analysis that Wood drew
his heaviest criticism from scholars, government officials, and Muslims across the
world. His claim that ISIS may be seriously motivated by religious and apocalyptic
aspirations came off, to many, as an attack against the entire Islamic tradition—not just
ISIS.

Jack Jenkins, in *What the Atlantic Gets Dangerously Wrong about ISIS*, counters
Woods publication by how he claims it unknowingly asserts that the Islamic tradition and
Islamic texts are the motivating factors behind the Islamic State’s actions and
motivations. Jenkins counters Wood’s claim by arguing ISIS was really just
“misinterpreting” ancient texts in order to rationalize violence and that describing ISIS as
“Islamic” was an inaccurate assessment. Jenkins continues to contend that Wood’s
declarations about ISIS are in themselves dangerous by how they “appear to have fallen
prey to an inaccurate trope all too common in many Western circles: that ISIS is an
inevitable product of Islam, mainly because the Qur’an and other Islamic texts contain
passages that support its horrific acts.”

Such an approach from Jenkins, however, avoids a multifaceted analysis of the Islamic
State—one which this thesis attempts to contribute to. By erroneously divorcing ISIS
from its sources of inspiration and the tradition it is claiming to be a part of, there is an

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9 Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," 5. Wood would come under fire for his assertion that ISIS was
“Islamic. Very Islamic.”
http://thinkprogress.org/world/2015/02/18/3624121/atlantic-gets-dangerously-wrong-isis-islam/,
11 Jenkins, "What The Atlantic Gets Dangerously Wrong About ISIS."
entire piece of the Islamic State that has been overlooked and dismissed. What currently appears to be a sudden fear of associating “all of Islam” with ISIS, has now resulted in avoidance of acknowledging the extra analysis is when approaching the Islamic State as this thesis attempts to do. Despite the backlash to Wood’s piece, this thesis attempts to only provide another angle of understanding the Islamic State—not the angle. In this way, this thesis hopes to bring to light possible benefits of studying the Islamic State and its literature as both being apocalyptic in nature.

My Three Claims

This thesis will not join the debate on whether the Islamic state is “Islamic” or not, but rather will take the Islamic State’s claim of being motivated by the Final Hour as a serious motivating factor behind its actions. As I will demonstrate, analyzing the apocalyptic nature of ISIS provides additional windows of analysis for how the group was able to popularize across the world and amass large portions of territory in such a short time frame. This method of approach will not only demonstrate why apocalyptic theology has played a central role in the Islamic State’s formation and development, but also how ISIS understands itself within Islamic history and how it approaches the necessary steps in fulfilling that role today. In light of such, this thesis makes three claims in regard to the Islamic State’s apocalyptic theology.

First, I argue there needs to be a foundational understanding of Islamic eschatology, what it entails, why it first formed, and how it developed over time due to the sociocultural, political, and theological environments that apocalyptic authors were living a part of. Without a baseline understanding of this information, the narrative that the
Islamic State seems to be referencing becomes easier to be overlooked or misinterpreted. As will be continuously noted, the Islamic State’s own apocalyptic narrative seems to be heavily influenced by one particular classic narration of the end times—which David Cook defines as the A’maq Cycle.\textsuperscript{12}

For ISIS, the world is heading towards a climactic and unavoidable end, where “pious” believers will be witnesses and combatants in battles against Christians (Rum or Byzantines), Jews, non-believers, and the Dajjal (Antichrist).\textsuperscript{13} These details, however, are not randomly chosen by ISIS from a slew of sources, but rather all follow a distinct classic apocalyptic narrative—the A’maq Cycle. This cycle, we find, is heavily concentrated on the return of Isa (Jesus), a global fitnah (occurring to show clear separation between apostates and “true” believers), the Dajjal, the conquering of Rome and Constantinople, and finally on what Cook coins as “The Moral Apocalypse.”\textsuperscript{14}

Understanding the Islamic State as an apocalyptically inspired group, which has constructed its narrative around the details of the A’maq Cycle; additional insights can be discovered in the Islamic State’s formation and ongoing development. Without understanding what this classic cycle entails and how it developed, there can be no grasp on the Islamic State’s own apocalyptic narrative. Therefore, I argue there needs to be first an understanding for what classic texts related to the A’maq Cycle entail, how the cycle first formed, and why the cycle has been able to be adopted by the Islamic State today for

\textsuperscript{12} The A’maq cycle will remain the focus of this thesis and research. It tends to heavily focus on a final confrontation between Christians and Muslims prior to the Hour. The historical context of this cycle and more specific details on it will be discussed in more depth toward the end of Chapter One when discussing the hadith literature and Kitab al-Fitan.


\textsuperscript{14} Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 238. The “Moral Apocalypse” describes an inherent desire, from the apocalyptic author or believer, to repair what they see as a deteriorating state of society, Islamic tradition, and the world physically and morally.
the basis of its own narrative in the 21st century.

Similarly, I argue that messianic speculation, apocalyptic literature, and violent revolution (or all three at once) tend to arise when Muslim communities perceive themselves as being under high levels anxiety, persecution, violence, and/or increased immorality. Since these common feelings within Muslim societies historically produce apocalyptic literature, I hope to display how the Islamic State’s online magazine *Dabiq* may also be the manifestation of similar feelings. In this way, *Dabiq* becomes an additional insight into the outlook, theology, motivation, and shared anxieties of the Islamic State.

Second, I argue acknowledging the Islamic State’s apocalyptic nature provides additional insight into the group’s current military tactics, way of governing, use of indiscriminate violence, and may possibly offer new perspectives for how ISIS plans to combat Western forces in the near future. For example, understanding the Islamic State’s apocalyptic theology helps further illuminate why ISIS chose to fight for control of Dabiq in Syria, why it is attacking Sunni and Shi’a tribes in spite of backlash from the larger Muslim community, why it attempts to govern regions through a strict interpretation of Shari’a Law, and also may explain why ISIS remains adamant in urging America to put “boots on the ground” in Syria despite being outnumbered and outgunned militarily. In this manner, approaching the Islamic State from an apocalyptic angle provides new perspectives on a number of its tactics and strategies that can benefit the wider discussion of what ISIS wants.

Third, I argue approaching the Islamic State’s *Dabiq* online magazine as an apocalyptic literature produces an additional insight for the group’s appeal and
fascination, which has already brought into Iraq and Syria between 15,000-20,000 foreign recruits. While appeals of being a part of an Islamic caliphate or the ability to conduct unrestricted violence have both been the popular analysis for the Islamic State’s success in drawing in recruits so far, this thesis attempts to highlight why the appeal of being witnesses of Final Hour should not be dismissed as irrational. An apocalyptic appeal may, in fact, further explain upon why the Islamic State has been able to become popular across the world in such a short time frame—particularly amongst foreign recruits.

Why Study Apocalypticism?

Islamic apocalyptic literature has recently been found to be quite beneficial for Islamic scholars and historians alike. While the field remains relatively new and unexplored in the West, scholars such as David Cook have begun to emphasize the benefits Islamic eschatology can provide for scholars. This is largely due to how apocalyptic literature now is viewed as providing deeper levels analysis for the political, theological, and societal structures of the particular communities where apocalyptic authors were writing from. Therefore, understanding the historical context of when apocalyptic literatures were written plays an enormous role for comprehending the details found inside them.

Hayrettij Yücesoy, in *Messianic Beliefs & Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam*, notes that messianic literatures have become increasingly significant for understanding Islamic history by how they tend to provide additional insight for how authors were “perpetuated by a particular mindset and outlook—an ideological illusion that served as a lens through

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15 Stern and Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, 76.
which historical actors saw political realities and projected action.”

For Yücesoy, messianic belief and the apocalyptic literature produced from it provides insight into how certain authors viewed their society, their religious tradition, and how they saw both being fixed in the future. Yücesoy also notes that the earliest apocalyptic literatures, developed within the first two centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, have become particularly important by how they “offer a unique perspective on the mentalities and overriding concerns of those involved in the events of the early Abbasid period and on how the creators and transmitters of prophecies perceived their sociopolitical realities.”

Other scholars, in a similar way, claim apocalyptic literature tends to be a direct reflection of how authors saw “themselves and the directions of their society’s development.”

In this fashion, apocalyptic literature is not just a narrative on how the world is going to end, but is also a personal assessment of the current state of society, morality, and the Islamic tradition’s future. David Cook, in his extensive research on Islamic apocalyptic literature, further argues that these authors also tended to see themselves as “creators, looking ahead toward the inevitable end of the world and the meeting with God.” As creators, these authors were inclined to look at everything around them as indisputable evidence of the inevitability of the approaching Hour and demanded its audiences react accordingly. In this way, as creators of its own literature (Dabiq), ISIS has created an apocalyptic vision of the world where time is running out for each human to “exit from

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17 Yücesoy, Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam, 11.
18 Cook, Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature, 2.
19 David Cook, Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 3.
the darkness of *shirk* (apostasy).*

Apocalyptic creators, Cook further notes, tend to support their narratives with two definitive themes—*time* “because it is so unbelievably short” and *meaning* because it “is to be found in everything.”

The Islamic State’s narrative, fueled by these same themes, places the group in a distinct moment in Islamic history—the period leading up to the Final Hour where time becomes shortest and meaning most important. For ISIS, the only undertaking left for the individual is the choice of living as an apostate in the “land of nonbelief” or as a believer in the “land of Islam,” where the self-declared caliphate was awaiting them.

By taking *Dabiq* as an apocalyptic literature, fresh insight in how ISIS is viewing itself, the society it is living a part of, and the future projection of the Islamic tradition all become more apparent. Despite *Dabiq* sharing a variety of characteristics with other apocalyptic texts, such an analysis of the magazine has, so far, been entirely dismissed.

This thesis, however, approaches the Islamic State as apocalyptically motivated and its written text as an apocalyptic literature. In this way, new windows for viewing the Islamic State, its anxieties, and its future strategies are produced. David Cook, writing years prior to the formation of ISIS, foresaw apocalyptic speculation becoming popularized within a modern Muslim society—especially one possessing high levels of anxiety, violence and warfare, distrust governmental powers, and uncertainty for the future trajectory of the Islamic tradition. Cook writes:

> Then as now, people desired to see meaning in the suffering and uncertainty that they experience constantly. If one knows that suffering is leading somewhere and is part of some divine plan, and then it becomes bearable…Muslim apocalypses are designed to encourage and to warn the believer, and to show him his place in

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20 *Dabiq* 3:15  
21 Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*, 3.
that plan. The material here is also designed for those who are pessimistic about
the ability of Islam to change the world in the short term…to believe that the
world is coming to an immediate end—it is a given that the present form of
religion is insufficient for the purposes of achieving one’s goals. The very
adoption of a worldview that leads to a messianic future implies that the present
system is at least partially a failure.22

Apocalyptic literature, from this angle of approach, is no longer a paranoid belief, but
rather is a view of the world (singular or communal) that attempts to make sense of
current events and the trajectory of the Islamic tradition. When messianic speculation is
no longer discredited as being taboo or the mindset of fanatics, scholars are able to open
new innovative approaches for why Muslim societies turn to apocalyptic sources and
begin to desire a drastic, cosmic, or divine alteration to the present state of reality—
suddenly viewed as a failure for how the future was supposed to look. Apocalyptic
literature, at the very least, should be continued to be analyzed by modern academia, and
those studying ISIS specifically, because “historians are bound to consult any shred of
evidence that they can find.”23

In much the same way, scholars analyzing the Islamic State today should examine
every piece of evidence provided, especially when it is directly produced by the Islamic
State. Even the most “un-believable” details of its apocalyptic narrative, such as the
appearance of the Dajjal, should not be so easily dismissed. These details have within
them a deeper context than what is found on the surface. For within discussion of the
Dajjal and who he might be, fears and anxieties rampant amongst Islamic State members
may be discovered. David Cook was one scholar who saw the deeper benefit of studying
apocalyptic literatures beyond such un-realistic details.

He writes, “Quite a number of the historical apocalypses and even the nightmare

22 Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 312.
23 Yücesoy, Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam, 10.
metahistorical apocalypses are strongly reminiscent of events that really occurred. After all, when one examines even something as extreme as the mass slaughter perpetrated by the Sufyani or the Dajjal, it is not so different from the behavior of al-Hajajj Ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafi, the infamous governor of Iraq…The difference is the interpretation given to the events, and the conclusion to which they lead.”

The writing transforms from a text describing the end of the world to a “reflection of a person’s position on social and political matters.”

While the names may be changed at times, analyzing apocalyptic literature provides fresh insight into how a specific community is feeling—through the writing of an individual—during a moment where everything begins to be viewed as in a state of turmoil—physically, morally, and spiritually. In a similar approach, understanding ISIS as apocalyptically inspired group provides additional insight into a variety of social and religious issues facing those living throughout the Middle East, especially in war-torn Iraq and Syria during the 21st century.

Possible Problems with Apocalyptic Study

As important as studying the possible insights found in apocalyptic literature, the small number of English speaking scholars has made this particular field relatively small and uncharted. David Cook, perhaps the leading scholar of this subject, argues the lack of interest may be the result of modern scholars regarding “the field…as entirely irrational and…its [apocalyptic] writers as unstable, or even as lunatics” but does warn that such a perspective becomes challenging when a “substantial proportion of a population—even if

24 Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 20.
25 Yücesoy, Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam, 16.
not the majority—shares a particular world-view.”\textsuperscript{26}

A serious study of this subject should not dismiss messianic belief as \textit{just} fanatical speculation of the future. Rather, analyzing apocalyptic literature can be understood as providing \textit{another} angle in why apocalyptic tends to arise in the first place. Yücesoy claims the negative attitude for studying such a subject may be the result of theoretical and methodological changes that academia underwent in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. He writes:

Our perceptions of the ideas, events, and individuals of the early Abbasid period have developed following a set of intellectual and ideological premises that were popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scholars had thought that the ‘national’ ambitions of Arabs and Persians played a major role in generating the Abbasid revolt and, later, the civil war…Even today this sectarian and nationalistic outlook permeates the thoughts of many scholars in regions where nation and community building efforts are under way. Furthermore the legacy of historical positivism, which claims the ability to find facts and sort subjective claims from objective reality, still lingers in scholarship in various manifestations, arriving in many cases at normative conclusions about the entirety of Islamic religion and culture.\textsuperscript{27}

For Yücesoy, the manner in which scholarship developed in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century(in particular when discussing Islamic history) helps explain why messianic belief today is often being re-interpreted into secular and nationalistic rhetoric. This, I argue, has also led to Wood’s assessment that modern approaches to jihadist groups tends to encompass a “monolithic” approach that adamantly denies religious motivation as being a serious factor in groups like the Islamic State’s actions and aspirations. Dismissing such contributions as \textit{only} political, economic, or social becomes counterintuitive in developing a multifaceted analysis of the Islamic State.

Another argument often made, in regards to the Islamic State’s apocalyptic nature, is that if such does exist it is only \textit{really} held by a small number of members. Another

\textsuperscript{26}Cook, \textit{Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature},

\textsuperscript{27}Yücesoy, \textit{Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam}, 5.
common claim made is that “it is impossible to know whether Baghdadi and other ISIS leaders truly believe that the end times are near or are using these prophecies instrumentally and cynically to attract a broader array of recruits.” 28 Both of these approaches, however, avoid taking serious the notion that a large aspect of the Islamic State’s motivation and recruitment revolves around an apocalyptic narrative that ISIS is openly discussing. Dismissing the Islamic State’s apocalyptic theology and constructed narrative (found in Dabiq) avoids a complete comprehension for what the group is doing, what it is fighting to achieve, and how ISIS plans to go about achieving such goals.

Chapter Breakdown

I have chosen to separate this thesis into two distinct sections to best cover the Islamic State’s apocalyptic nature. The first section (Chapters one & two) exclusively focus on the development and transformation that Islamic eschatology and apocalyptic literature has undergone over time. This will be done while also providing specific examples of when messianic speculation tended to arise within Islamic societies. In this way, I highlight how the initial details of Islamic eschatology first formed in the Qur’an, transformed in the first two centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, and how the early extra-Qur’anic texts were heavily influenced by the events occurring around the time they were written—including civil wars, theological debates, and battles against the Christian Byzantine Empire. In this manner, I bring to light the historical context of the sources that the Islamic State seems to be influenced by and referencing throughout Dabiq. This is especially important in regards to the A’maq Cycle, which formed and developed during this specific period in Islamic history.

28 Stern and Berger, ISIS: The State of Terror, 231.
Chapter two will proceed to look at exclusively at messianic speculation leading to revolution—including in Sudan, Iran, and Mecca. The second half of the chapter will then look at the transformation apocalyptic literature underwent toward the end of the 20th century and the beginning of 21st century—a time that saw the attacks of 9/11, the American invasion of Afghanistan, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. In this way, Chapter two highlights examples of both messianic uprisings and the radical shift apocalyptic literature begin to undertake only in the last three decades. In this way, Chapter two lays the foundation for how apocalyptic speculation has already produced modern revolutions and how apocalyptic literature has changed in a manner that provided room for increased anxiety and widespread distrust of Western forces—in particular the United States of America.

Chapter three begins the second angle of approach in analyzing the Islamic State’s apocalyptic nature. Rather than exclusively analyze Islamic eschatology, this chapter will instead focus on the development and formation of the Islamic State over the 21st century. Beginning with the founder of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, this chapter will highlight how apocalyptic speculation has been able to develop and adapt alongside the trajectory of the group from AQI to its present manifestation of the Islamic State or ISIS. This chapter will help emphasize how messianic speculation first became rampant following the 2007 announcement of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), how such speculation nearly led to the complete collapse of ISI in 2009, and how the group changed its messianic focus from the Mahdi to the A’maq Cycle beginning in 2010 under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Chapter four will exclusively analyze all thirteen issues of the Islamic State’s Dabiq
online magazine. By taking the apocalyptic theology of the Islamic State seriously and as an important motivating factor in its ongoing development, *Dabiq* provides fresh insight into the Islamic State’s motivations, theology, end goals, anxieties, recruitment, and future strategies in combatting its enemies. Being the crux of my argument, this chapter will focus on highlighting exactly how *Dabiq* is influenced by the A’maq Cycle, how it shares common conspirator views of the world (as modern novels have), and how the Islamic State is using *Dabiq* to lay out its attempts at igniting a global religious war between “true” Muslims and everyone else. In this way, *Dabiq* becomes an additional perspective for what the Islamic State wants and how it is going about achieving those goals.

Pierre Filiu, a scholar of contemporary apocalyptic literatures, noted in the early 21st century that Islamic eschatology was not only a strong source of inspiration for Muslims historically, but warned that it may once again be tapped into to provide room for jihadists to defend the use of wide-scale violence. While writing prior to the formation of the Islamic State, Filiu seems to have foreseen a terrorist organization taking advantage of Islamic eschatology in the manner that ISIS seems to have done today. He writes:

> Yet one day a larger and more resourceful group, eager to tap the energy of the ‘masses’ as a way of achieving superiority over rival formation, may be strongly tempted to resort to the messianic gambit. An appeal to the imminence of apocalypse would provide it with an instrument of recruitment, a framework for interpreting future developments, and a way of refashioning and consolidating its own identity. In combination, these things could have far-reaching and deadly consequences.29

Nearly three years later the Islamic State has fulfilled Filiu’s prediction. By focusing on Islamic eschatology, the Islamic State cut itself off from Al-Qaeda, called for violent

jihad against everyone opposed its rule (including Sunni tribes), introduced a strict
version of Shari’a Law, has blown up ancient buildings across Iraq and Syria, legalized
slavery, slaughtered minority religious tribes such as the Yazidis, and claimed that the
announcement of an established caliphate was the first step in fulfilling prophecy. These
strategic moves, alongside an increase in violence toward Muslims across the region,
were not just tactics in pursuit of nationalistic agendas—but instead seem to stem from
the desire to be a part of something much bigger than a government or nation-state.

The actions and motives of the Islamic State, I argue, orbit around a prophesied
victory against the greatest of odds in attempt to protect and purify the Islamic tradition.
The Islamic State’s apocalyptic outlook, in this way, impacts its actions, goals,
recruitment, and theology—and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Without
approaching the Islamic State’s apocalyptic nature as being another serious motivating
factor behind its actions, we ultimately lose sight of a critical component of the group;
one that is influencing its development, recruitment, and strategy in combatting
opponents. The Islamic State, I argue, has been able to combine the words and traits of
classic apocalyptic narratives with an offensive jihad to create a theological movement
that does not stop with airstrikes, the death of a leader, or the loss of a province. Rather
the Islamic State sees itself only stopping with the end of the world, and this is a
dangerous analysis to be overlooked.
Chapter 1: Islamic Eschatology and the Development of Apocalyptic Literature

As the centuries wore one, the apocalyptic viewpoint of history became more and more the hallmark of the early traumatic period, and not something necessary for the Muslim community to continue to develop, since it had developed its own view of history….we find that historical apocalyptic material is not only relevant in the time it was created, but is universally relevant and is in constant use and reuse, with the aid of new interpretation, until our own time.  

David Cook

Before approaching the Islamic State’s own literature, there needs to be further analysis on possible reasons for why Islamic eschatology began developing so early in Islamic history. By looking exclusively at what is found in the Qur’an, hadiths, and Kitab al-Fitan, a gradual development arises in the characteristics that would continue to influence apocalyptic literature throughout time. If we are to take the Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative seriously, with regard to being an additional insight into its outlook of the world and itself, then it becomes necessary to first look at the sources that ISIS has been citing and referencing in Dabiq.

Thus, it becomes vital to not only recognize how Islamic eschatology formed but also within what social and political environments the literatures were written. This becomes especially important in understanding why the Islamic States has relied heavily upon the classic sources to construct its own narrative. For example, it would be found in the early extra-Qur’anic sources the first reference of the Dajjal, battles against Christians, the return of Jesus and his defeat of the Dajjal, and a global fitna (civil strife or war) amongst Muslims signifying that the Hour was nearing. As we will later find, all of these issues have been incorporated into the Islamic State’s own apocalyptic narrative today. In this way, it becomes crucial to discover how these topics became not only a part of the Islamic State’s narrative, but also why they were adopted into Islamic eschatology in the

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30 Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 49.
first place.

Understanding the atmosphere in which these literatures were being written will provide only a more thorough understanding of a variety of terms, references, and end goals used by ISIS, and will also highlight that apocalyptic literature first arose by way of early Muslim communities attempting to make sense of the political and sociocultural environments that they were living in. In this way, along with an absence of apocalyptic detail in the Qur’an, Islamic eschatology would dramatically develop after the death of the Prophet Muhammad by beginning to incorporate events occurring during the first two hundred years after his death. This was often done in an attempt to resolve widespread anxieties and uncertainties shared by the Muslim community that began looking to the Final Hour as guidance on how to properly conduct itself in preparation for it.

As will be noted, Islamic eschatology did not develop overnight but has instead undergone a variety of changes and additions, as a result to the social environments that the authors were living a part of. Additionally, understanding what is found (or not found) within these early literatures will help us better grasp the Islamic State’s apocalyptic literature today and why it is that ISIS decided to choose the classical A’maq Cycle as inspiration for its own narrative. By examining these historical literatures and the additions they made to Islamic eschatology, we will uncover numerous similarities between what is found in them and what the Islamic State is referencing today to support its narrative and legitimacy as a “prophetic” caliphate.

Approaching historical apocalyptic literature, however, is no easy task and has been a subject that only a small number of modern scholars have studied and written on—in some cases entire books discussing classic sources in the from the first two centuries after
the death of the Prophet Muhammad.\textsuperscript{31} For this reason the scope of such an entire study remains well beyond my own research. Since this is the case, I rely on two foundational works in Islamic eschatological studies for this section: David Cook’s \textit{Studies of Muslim Apocalyptic} and Hayrettin Yücesoy’s \textit{Messianic Beliefs & Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam}. My contribution will be to draw out the aspects of both works that relate directly to the development of the A’maq Cycle, which I argue are the foundation of the Islamic State’s current apocalyptic narrative.

In addition, I will discuss how apocalyptic speculation may have begun in the Islamic tradition as early as the first twelve years of the Prophethood of Muhammad, fashioning the early Meccan Surahs of the \textit{Qur’an}. I will also note how most of the details of Islamic eschatology and the A’maq Cycle originate directly from the authoritative hadith collections of Burkari, Muslim, Dawud, and Nu’aym Ibn Hammad’s \textit{Kitab al-Fitan}. The scope of research will only be looking at the eschatological narratives from within the Sunni tradition.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{Cycles of Classical Apocalyptic Literature}

We begin this section by first describing the material in the \textit{Qur’an} that, according to Cook, demonstrates the first apocalyptic speculation arising within Islamic Eschatology. Cook divides the classic material (\textit{Qur’an}, hadiths, \textit{Kitab al-fitan}, etc) into four distinct categories in order to allow a deeper study of both common and differing themes of these

\textsuperscript{31} See David Cook’s \textit{Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic} and Hayrettin Yücesoy’s \textit{Messianic Beliefs & Imperial Political in Medieval Isla}. Both of these sources were major contributions to this chapter and I owe my thanks to the extensive work both of these scholars have accomplished on the subject matter.

\textsuperscript{32} Abbas Amanat’s \textit{Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi’ism} remains a source I reference periodically, especially when discussing issues in Chapter Two like the Iranian Revolution. Shi’a apocalyptic literature, however, has become its own distinct field of study and Cook devotes an entire chapter to the subject. It is important to note that this subject will be beyond the scope of my own research and specifically plays no part in understanding ISIS’s narrative.
earliest literatures. These four major categories are then broken up into sixteen distinct cycles—each with its own narrative, characters, citations and references, and “enemies” that will be combatted in battles prior to the Final Hour.33 The differences between these cycles are occasionally trivial, but at other times they can be quite extensive in describing what is going to happen during the Final Hour. This discrepancy is often due to the time period that the apocalyptic author was living in, the issues the society was facing, and the geographical location the author was living in.34 According to Cook, each cycle should thus be categorized both by its historical context as well as the material that is discussed within it.

Using this method of approach, Cook formed the four major classifications of Islamic apocalyptic literatures—historical apocalypses,35 metahistorical apocalypses,36 messianic apocalypses,37 and moral apocalypses.38 Cook also found that it would difficult, if not impossible, to isolate a specific author or literature into just one of these categories. For this reason, many authors and texts can be a part of differing cycles depending on what

33 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 122. One example of such is there being one cycle may discuss the final battle between the Dajjal and Jesus while another cycle may discuss the battle as being between the Mahdi and the Sufyani (a predominantly Shi’a messianic figure).
34 It would be nearly impossible to spend significant amount of time discussing each cycle to the level that Cook has done in his own research. I hope to just highlight that each cycle has been separated, by Cook, and was done in a way to allow deeper analysis of particular aspects of Islamic eschatology. Also, all apocalyptic writers in this research are identified as male, and Cook often refers to authors with masculine pronouns.
35 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 34. “In these traditions there exist recognizable historical personalities, and a historical sequence of events that leaves reality at a particular point and moves into the realm of fantasy…Frequently the apocalyptist makes the use of allegory, or condenses material—repressing items that do not fit into his scheme of history—in order to achieve a story line that is in harmony with his political-theological bent.”
36 Ibid., 92. “Metahistorical Apocalypses are those that are entirely unconnected with historical events, and are set in the eschatological future. They can, however, contain certain historical data, and there are occasionally historical personalities submerged under code-named and descriptions, though often these have been either idealized or demonized almost out of recognition.”
37 Ibid., 137. “These cycles are the heart of Muslim apocalyptic…throughout all of these cycles runs the common theme of justice and righteousness lacking in the everyday commonplace world, which can only be restored by a messianic figure by means of the sword.”
38 Ibid., 249. “One of the themes used most often by the apocalyptist [in this cycle] is to contrast the outward state of things with the inwards.”
issue they are discussing. For example, Nu’aym b. Hammad’s work (discussed below), at times, falls under both historical apocalypses and metahistorical apocalypses due to the amount of sources he cites in his *Kitab al-Fitan*. One of Nu’aym’s greatest contributions to Islamic eschatology, however, has been the narratives found within what Cook defines as the A’maq Cycle—the focus of this thesis. This specific cycle, dealing with a final battle against Christians, experienced revivals of attention during specific time periods in Islamic history. This included during the Crusades when war between Christians and Muslims were at the forefront of the minds of Muslim communities and apocalyptic authors. In this way, Cook finds that the A’maq Cycle is not “only relevant to the time in which it was created, but is universally relevant and is in constant use and reuse, with the aid of new interpretation.”\(^{39}\)

This cycle has, I argue, once again become the main source of inspiration in modern times for the Islamic State’s own apocalyptic narrative, which is heavily focused on fighting Christians prior to the Final Hour. In this manner, we find that the A’maq Cycle has its own distinct narrative, characteristics, foes, and understanding for how the end of the world is going to occur—all stemming from the social and political environments of the first two hundred years after Muhammad’s death when the Muslim empires were in constant battle with the Byzantine Empire. This was also a time where there was constant civil wars occurring internally within the Muslim empire, including the Abbasid revolution in the middle of the 8\(^{th}\) century. As will be noted later, these political and social issues would help lay the foundation for the A’maq Cycle and allow it to remain relevant over the course of Islamic history through modernity.

It is, however, important to note that there are many discrepancies between the vast

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 49.
amount of cycles and classic apocalyptic narratives. Since this is the case, it has become quite problematic, if not impossible, to find any baseline commonality for what Islamic eschatology involves. For this reason, I found it best to start with the source of greatest authority within the Islamic tradition, i.e. the Qur’an. This analysis of the Qur’an will attempt to demonstrate how eschatology first arose, as well as how eschatology largely developed from extra-Qur’anic sources.

The Qur’an and Eschatology

When attempting to study the broad subject of Islamic eschatology it is critical to begin with the Qur’an in order to detect what information is or is not found within the Islamic tradition’s Holy Scripture and source of highest authority. Since the Qur’an is thought of as being the direct word of God, it tends to be looked at first for resolving any spiritual or political issue occurring in a Muslim society. Much like how Islamic Law would develop through this understanding of the Qur’an’s role in answering questions during the Middle Ages, apocalyptic authors also tended to view the Qur’an as possessing higher authority on the end times than other pieces of literature and text within the tradition. Yet overtime, it will be extra-Qur’anic sources that begin to be most referenced and cited as sources of authority within Islamic eschatology, specifically in the late 20th century novels and the Islamic State’s Dabiq.

The reason for this development of citing extra-Qur’anic sources, I argue, was due to the lack of detail provided in the Qur’an and the vast amount of apocalyptic narratives developed in the hadiths and Kitab al-Fitan following the death of the Prophet Muhammad’s death in 632 C.E. Nevertheless, the Qur’an remains important text for this
research in a number of ways. Alongside providing the first details of Islamic eschatology on the Final Hour, the *Qur’an* also provides an opening into the earliest thoughts, fears, and anxieties of the Muslim community living in Mecca under the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad. In this manner the *Qur’an* can, when observed through an apocalyptic lens, be understood an additional insight into why apocalyptic speculation arises in Muslim communities.

Cook claims that while “we will never know what exactly the beliefs of the Muslims in this early period…we understand that the *Qur’an* is the only certain representative of the first Muslims” but that it should be still be understood as “an eschatological book not an apocalyptic book.” In this way, Cook highlights two substantial points in regard to the importance of the *Qur’an* in the study of apocalyptic literature. First, the *Qur’an* should be understood as eschatological literature rather than an apocalyptic text. Second, the *Qur’an* is possibly the only “certain” representation of the early Muslim community that scholars have today, and can be analyzed as being able to provide insight into the feelings and motives of the early community living under persecution and oppression from the Quraysh (leading tribe of Mecca at the time).

The latter proponent of Cook’s statement, claiming that the *Qur’an* is eschatological rather than apocalyptic, is important to emphasize below. For Cook, the reason behind this discrepancy is due to the fact that while there is mention of a coming Day of Judgement (*Yam al-Hasab*), there remains no clear timeline or detail of events (such as battles) or figures (such as the Dajjal) found with the *Qur’an*. The reasoning behind this is that the *Qur’an* provides a certainty that the end of the world will occur, but fails to

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40 Ibid., 9.
41 Yücesoy, *Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam*, 36.
mention exactly how it will come about or how believers should act prior to its appearance.

The scholar John B. Taylor makes similar claims about the eschatological characteristic of the Qur’an but takes a different angle of approach to support his claim. Taylor argues that the Qur’an is eschatological by how it tends to place its readers into immediate end time scenarios. This feature constantly demands the reader’s to draw their attention to their own piety instead of wider and communal issues that will be occurring during the Final Hour. Taylor contends that the Qur’an’s eschatological message is “didactic” in this way because it attempts to continuously remove speculation of the Final Hour “from the background of men’s minds,” by placing “the Judgement and the After-life…to the forefront.”

In this manner, the Day of Judgement demands constant attention from the reader since each person will be judged according to their own deeds and piety. Taylor goes on to describe the Qur’an as “a book of promise and threat concerning men’s reward or punishment on the Last Day” rather than a book discussing a “cosmic time scale” like most apocalyptic literatures attempt to do. In this light, the Qur’an lacks providing ideas on battles, the Dajjal, the Mahdi, or the Byzantines—even though most of these subjects have dominated Islamic eschatology outside the confines of the Qur’an.

To further support his claim, Taylor discusses how the Qur’an often positions the Day of Judgement as imminent and that it will appear so swiftly that no one will be able to avoid it. For Taylor, the Qur’anic mention that “the matter of the Hour is as a twinkling

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44 Ibid., 67.
of the eye or nearer,” re-enforces the didactic nature of the Qur’an.\textsuperscript{45} Norman O. Brown, similarly, argues that while Christian apocalyptic authors have been able to point to the Books of Revelation, Daniel, or Ezekiel as sources of authority for interpreting the end of the world, there remains no parallel component found in the Qur’an.

Unlike the Bible’s narrative “running from Genesis to Apocalypse,” the Qur’anic narrative of the end times “is not reached at the end of a line” but rather implies “eschatology can break out at any moment.”\textsuperscript{46} This echoes the arguments that John Taylor previously made on the didactic nature of the Qur’an. Since the Qur’an’s structure and layout is from longest to shortest Surah (and not a beginning and end), the text is able to continuously warn readers that the Day of Judgement is approaching. By lacking precise details on what will exactly occur, while also promising the inevitability of the Hour, the Qur’an becomes an eschatological text that may be highlighting the feelings of the first Muslim community who may have been preparing for the Final Hour’s manifestation at any instant.

**Signs of the Hour in the Qur’an**

Without a clear description for what is to occur during the Final Hour within the Qur’an, there has been a wide range of speculation and disagreement among Muslims and scholars alike in filling in missing details. Since the Qur’an often has been described as an eschatological text due to the lack of such detail, it is important to note that the text does still make mention of signs of the Hour (ashrat al-Sa’a) that are to appear during the Final Hour—not prior to it. This phrase is used over forty times within the Qur’an, as

\textsuperscript{45} Qur’an 16:77
well as another common phrase “there is no doubt that the Hour will come,” which can be found in Surahs (Chapters) 18:21, 22:7, 40:59, and 45:32. Yet, the context of these passages tends to reiterate the concept that the Final Hour had already begun and judgment is approaching. Signs of the Hour also tend to be understood as coming directly from the mandate of God and thus inescapable. The Signs, in this way, serve the purpose of both verifying to believers that the Final Hour had started and as punishment sent against non-believers.

An example is found in Surah 44:10-12 where there is mention of a smoke coming upon the earth during the Final Hour, “Then watch though for the Day That the sky will Bring forth a kind Of smoke plainly visible Enveloping the people: This will be a Penalty Grievous. (They will say) ‘Our Lord! Remove The Penalty from us, for we do really believe!” Another example is found in Surah 27:82 where there is mention of a Beast coming to earth as punishment against non-believers, “And when the Word is Fulfilled against them (the unjust) We shall produce from the earth A Beast to (face) them: He will speak to them, For that mankind did not Believe with assurance in our Signs.”

In this way, both of these Signs of the Hour serve as divine punishment against those who denied the message of Muhammad or the existence of God. It is, however, important to note that the word “signs” can and often does serve a multitude of functions outside of association with the Final Hour. Descriptions of signs, in this way, are typically referenced as either proof of God’s existence, the divine power of God, or the legitimacy of God’s prophets—all of which have tended to be continuously denied by non-believers. For example, in Surah 40:81 there is made mention of God’s signs provided to humanity

47 Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 270.
in hopes of them believing in God’s existence, “And he shows you (always) His signs: then which Of the Signs of Allah Will ye deny?” In a similar fashion, Surah 30:22 claims, “And among His Signs Is the creation of the heavens And the earth, and the variations In your languages and your colors; verily In that are Signs For those who know.” These examples help stress that the term “signs” can, and often are, mentioned outside the context of being associated with the Final Hour.

Signs, however, have been typically understood in later apocalyptic literatures as being directly related to the Final Hour and as means for the world to begin realizing the immediacy of the Day of Judgement. In this way, Signs are typically separated into “Lesser Signs of the Hour” or “Greater Signs of the Hour.” The Lesser Signs usually include events such as “natural events designed to warn humanity that the end is near and to bring people into a state of repentance.” These Lesser Signs also tend to be less apparent than the greater signs and can be easily over-looked—especially among non-believers. For Cook, the Lesser Signs tend to be applicable to any society across time and space and thus are used by authors for “inciting apocalyptic enthusiasm at any given time.” This has most especially become the case in modern apocalyptic literatures where current events are inherently tied to being the Lesser Signs of the Hour.

The Greater Signs of the Hour, however, usually are projected to come at the end of the Final Hour, are entirely unavoidable, and tend to be associated with what information is provided within the Qur’an. Cook defines the Greater Signs as “a series of events of ever-increasing severity that will precede the end of the world, at which time the damned will be judged and the blessed will begin to taste the pleasures God has in store for them

48 Cook, Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature, 9.
49 Ibid., 9.
in heaven.”

Another scholar claims the “major signs will include the decline of Islam [and] altering the natural order such as the sun rising in the west or the eclipse of the sun.” In this manner, the Greater Signs often do appear in the Qur’an but tend to be either cosmological or natural disasters. Examples of such include the “Sun rising in the West” (44:10), the ripping apart of the sky (84:1), and the appearance of Yajuj and Majuj (Gog and Magog) 18:94.

These Qur’anic signs, however, remained to be understood as being enacted by the will of God and are nothing Muslim communities can stop or prevent. Rather, they serve as indications that the Final Hour is concluding and that Judgment will soon commence. It would appear, however, that two of the most cited and referenced signs of the Hour taken from the Qur’an tend to be the appearance of Gog and Magog and the Second Coming of Jesus. The appearances of both of these characters come towards the end of the Hour and are essential in bringing about the messianic future.

Gog and Magog

The figures known as Gog and Magog have, overtime, become two of the most referenced Signs. They tend to be understood as being punishments for humanity’s disbelief. Surah 18:94 describes them, “They Said: ‘O Dhu al Qarnayn! [Often associated with Alexander the Great] The Gog and Magog (people) Do great mischief on earth: Shall we then render thee Tribute in order that Thou mightiest erect a barrier between us and them? On that day We shall Leave them to surge Like waves on one another; The

50 Ibid., 8.
52 Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 283.
trumpet will be blown, And We shall Collect them All together.”

There has been speculation, within the Islamic tradition, that the barrier mentioned is the Great Wall of China and was constructed by Alexander the Great. In this way, the tradition believes this barrier will keep the two creatures hidden from earth until the sound of a trumpet blast. Whether these two characters are actual ‘beasts’ or metaphoric manifestations of foreign tribes (both explanations have been given in apocalyptic literatures), they are usually understood as bringing widespread destruction to the world and will be nearly unstoppable.

While typically viewed as “the peoples of the East,” Gog and Magog have also historically been understood as being a “nomadic invasion.”53 In much the same way that the A’maq cycle received revitalization during the crusades, Gog and Magog would end up receiving large amounts of attention and speculation within apocalyptic literatures during the Mongol Sack of Baghdad in 1258 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. It is, however, important to note that the two figures oddly do not play any large part of the Islamic State’s narrative. This, I argue, has been a result of ISIS constructing its apocalyptic narrative through the A’maq Cycle which had developed when Muslims were combatting the Byzantines rather than nations from the East. The evolution for how apocalyptic writers would discuss and reference Gog and Magog is mentioned here to emphasize the continuous shifting that can occur with interpreting Qur’anic signs of the Hour. This, again, is often a result of the social and political environments of the time and region in which apocalyptic literatures were being written.

Another notable feature of these characters (shared across apocalyptic narratives), Cook notes, is that they tend to be described as engaging in horrific acts of moral

53 Ibid., 185.
indecency including eating corpses and aborted fetuses.\textsuperscript{54} For this reason, Cook places Gog and Magog into the “Messianic Apocalypse” category because their appearance during the Final Hour is meant to bring to reality the “justice and righteousness lacking in the everyday commonplace world [that] can only be restored by a messianic figure by means of the sword.”\textsuperscript{55} Through this analysis of their end time role, Gog and Magog have been understood as being sent by God as a divine punishment because “things need to sing as low as possible before they can be purified and be cleaned up.”\textsuperscript{56} The appearance of Gog and Magog, in this way, must be followed by the appearance of this messianic figure capable of destroying the two figures prior to the Day of Judgement.

The Second Coming of Jesus and \textit{Fitna}

The end time role of Jesus as a messianic figure has been disputed historically, but apocalyptic scholars and some Muslims point to Surah 4:157-158 as evidence of his eschatological appearance. “They said ‘We killed Christ Jesus The Son of Mary, The Messenger of Allah’—But they killed him not. Nor crucified him…For of a surety They Killed him not—Nay, Allah raised him up Unto himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power.”\textsuperscript{57} Within this Surah is a dispute on whether or not Jesus was crucified, where apocalyptic writers (and Muslims) tend to agree that he was instead raised up to heaven waiting for his appearance during the Final Hour.

Another, and more notable, reference of Jesus’s eschatological presence in the \textit{Qur’an} comes from Surah 43:61. This passage is from the viewpoint of Jesus (according to some

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 182.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 137.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 186.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Qur’an} 4:157-158
commentators) where he was noted as stating, “And this shall be A Sign (for the coming Of) the Hour (of Judgement): Therefore have no doubt About the (Hour), but Follow ye Me: this is a Straight Way.” In this way, it would appear in the Qur’an that Jesus possesses a critical role during the Final Hour. The return of Jesus and his role in the final battles of al-Malhamah al-Kubra have historically been referenced in apocalyptic literatures, but only received revitalization within the last few decades—including playing a major part in Islamic State’s own apocalyptic narrative. For example Issue 5 of Dabiq states:

A number of the narrations concerning the events that take place in Sham as the Hour draws closer include the mention of Isa Ibn Maryam (Jesus)…These narrations typically speak of the final battles that the Muslims will engage in with the Christians and Jews, including the confrontation in which the Muslims are led by Isa against the Dajjal. If Allah had willed, He could have left the Muslims to witness this epic engagement under the leadership of an ordinary man from amongst them. Instead, He decreed that it would be a Prophet.

In this way, the Islamic State understands and views Jesus as playing a pivotal part in its constructed narrative. This again is due to how his eschatological role developed from the A’maq Cycle. In most classic apocalyptic accounts, Jesus is viewed as coming to earth and being among the final group of Muslims during Morning Prayer before proceeding to kill the Dajjal (Antichrist). Other notable accounts mentioned that Jesus would “destroy” the cross upon his appearance. This served as a way of stressing the theological debate between Christians and Muslims and emphasizes that Jesus would not understand why the former would worship his crucifixion instead of God. Both of these Islamic apocalyptic understandings may have been a direct result of the theological disputes occurring between Christians and early Muslim communities in the centuries

58 Qur’an 43:61
59 Dabiq 5:3 See appendix for more citations and mentions of Isa (Jesus) found in Dabiq.
after Muhammad’s death.  

What these examples highlight, however, is that Jesus adopted a large role in Islamic eschatology despite the lack of detail found within the Qur’an. Both ISIS and other apocalyptic literatures and narratives understand Jesus playing an important role in the Final Hour despite the lack of specificity in the tradition’s source of authority. There is mention of him in the Qur’an but such references lack any discussion of a final confrontation with Gog and Magog or killing of the Dajjal—the latter being a major point of emphasis in the A’maq Cycle. Cook claims that this may have been a result because early on in Islamic history, “Jesus’ position…was very much in flux…and apparently the combination of the polemical relationship with Christianity and the developing cult of the Prophet’s family ensured that he was gradually reduced to…the Dajjal Cycle, in which he remains to kill the Dajjal.”  

While the messianic role of Jesus during the Final Hour is referenced in the Qur’an, there appears to again be ample evidence that the majority of his narrative developed in the extra-Qur’anic sources.  

In a similar manner, another major missing apocalyptic feature of the Qur’an, which would later became a major point of emphasis for how Muslims would begin discussing the signs of the Hour, is the term fitna. This term seems to have been developed in extra-Qur’anic sources during the centuries after Muhammad’s death—largely due to the influence of Nu’aym’s Kitab al-Fitan on Islamic eschatology. Whereas the term is later identified in these extra-Qur’anic sources as meaning civil strife, war, or internal disorder amongst the Muslim population prior to the Final Hour, the Qur’an never mentions it in such a manner. The scholar Hayrettin Yücesoy points out that the term is never

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60 Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 104.
61 Ibid., 139.
mentioned alongside of or in connection with the apocalypse or Final Hour within the Qur’an. Rather fitna is typically discussed within the Qur’an as meaning either a civil trial (Q 8:28), dissension (Q 37), seduction (Q 7:27), persecution (Q 2:191), or plots of conspiracy (Q 9:47-48).62

Yücesoy notes, “Given this absence of any apocalyptic meaning attached to the term fitna in the Qur’an, its apocalyptic connotations must therefore be ascribed to the civil war generation in the decades following the death of Muhammam.”63 In this light, it would be the civil wars that would begin to understand the term in an apocalyptic manner. Cook describes that from this change that occurred the term would begin to be understood in apocalyptic literatures as a “continual down-spiral of events…leading to a very narrow point through which only the best can pass. This point is the crisis point, the fitna.”64 The French Scholar Jean-Pierre Filiu also notes that the phrase undertook an apocalyptic connotation in the centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad where, “the end of times [were] generally treated under the rubric of dissension (fitan, plural of fitna), for quarrels among Muslims, it was believed, must inevitably accompany and precipitate an apocalyptic course of events.”65

Here again there begins to be evidence to support that major aspects of Islamic eschatology, especially the Islamic State’s narrative, developed from outside the Qur’an. With such a lack of specificity in regard to what the “Signs of the Hour” represented in the Qur’an, early Muslim communities would only have been provided with a promise

62 Yücesoy, Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam, 37.
63 Ibid., 38.
64 Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 20.
65 Filiu and DeBevoise, Apocalypse in Islam, 13.
that the world would end prior to the Day of Judgement. The lack of detail found in the Qur’an on identifying lesser signs occurring within society allowed for early Muslim societies, after the death of Muhammad, to begin speculating on clues for when the world was going to end.

According to the Qur’an, however, such details are only known by God. This notion expands upon the notion that the Final Hour could appear at any moment and believers should be prepared for it. Surah 16:77, for example, states, “To Allah belongeth the Mystery of the heavens and the earth. And the decision of the Hour (of Judgement) is as the twinkling of an eye, or even quicker: For Allah hath power over all things.” Similar assertions can be found in Surah 7:187, “They ask thee about the Final Hour—when will be its appointed time?” While Surah 31:34 repeats this view, “Verily the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah alone,” as does Surah 33:63 “Men ask thee concerning the Hour: Say, ‘The knowledge thereof is with Allah alone.” Believers were not left without any indication on the details regarding the Final Hour, but rather were left, in the Qur’an, with a promise that only God would know when it is going to occur.

Muhammad and Apocalyptic Inclinations in Mecca

While it is important to note information on the signs of the Hour within the Qur’an in order to highlight how Islamic eschatology developed from extra-Qur’anic materials, it is also vital to discuss possible explanations for why apocalyptic speculation may have been a part of the scripture at all. As Cook stated, “While we will never know what exactly the beliefs of the Muslims in this early period…we understand that the Qur’an is the only

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66 Ibid., 4.
67 Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 271.
68 Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 19.
certain representative of the first Muslims.” Through this mode of thought there can now be a deeper analysis on the early Muslim community’s possible anxieties during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad.  

There is no absolute certainty of such a claim, but there remains a strong possibility that these early apocalyptic references and claims arose due to high levels of religious persecution and oppression the first Muslim community faced in Mecca from the leading Quraysh tribe. By analyzing the specific time period prior to Muhammad’s migration to Medina, I argue that apocalyptic speculation was heavily discussed in the revelations given between 610 and 622 C.E due to the persecution the community was facing at this time. Recently, as Cook has attempted to argue, there has been an increase of contentions that the Qur’an’s eschatological narrative may have been a result of a mass sharing of religious texts in the region, especially in regard to the Books of Daniel and Revelation.  

While this approach has become a topic of research for a variety of current Islamic scholars, I find that such a method of approach (for this thesis) fails to offer additional insights for how apocalyptic thought may have played a major motivating factor behind the development of the early Muslim community.  

Rather, I approach this specific timeframe by bracketing the Qur’an away from any possible outside textual influence from other religious scriptures. I attempt to view the Qur’an as a literature containing the views and anxieties that may have been held by Muhammad and/or early Muslim community (much the same way I do with Dabiq in Chapter four). Through this method of approach, I was able to uncover similar traits between how the Prophet Muhammad may have viewed the Meccan society of his time to

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69 Ibid., 9.
70 See David Cook’s An Early Muslim Daniel Apocalypse for more information regarding this topic.
that of later apocalyptic authors understandings of their own societies.

Cook has stated that, “The very adoption of a worldview that leads to a messianic future implies that the present system is at least partially a failure,” and I find that this is common trait for all Islamic apocalyptic/eschatological narratives. This notion has been reinforced with how the Islamic tradition views history prior to either the birth of Muhammad in 570 or his first revelation in 610 C.E. as being a part of *al-Jahiliyyah* (the age of ignorance). The time period before the advent of Islam is traditionally viewed as being spiritually and morally blind, practicing the worship of many gods, and a time ruled by tribal affiliations through bloodlines. The Islamic tradition’s designation of the time prior to Muhammad’s Prophethood as being in a state of ignorance highlights that the early communities were viewing the system they were living a part of as a failure and in need of sweeping change.

Whether this means that change would be as a result of the end of the world or another factor remains up for debate, but by approaching of the *Qur’an* as an eschatological literature there is evidence that Muhammad and his earliest followers may have possessed similar, if not identical, worldviews that later apocalyptist authors did. The desire for change of the present system, for Muhammad, centered on the notion that he had been given the duty of bringing monotheism and the religion of Abraham to the Arabs who were (at that time) practicing paganism. Some of his earliest revelations centered on conveying the message of *tawhid* (One God) and is found in Surah 112, “Say: He is One, God the Self-Sufficient, He did not beget, nor was He begotten, And unto Him there is equal no one.”

Muhammad’s attempt to convey a new religious monotheistic message resulted in
opposition and persecution from the leading Quraysh tribe in a number of ways. Early on counterclaims to his message came in the form of reports and accusations that Muhammad was either possessed, a poet, or a soothsayer rather than the messenger of God. These accusations were done in a manner to somehow delegitimize the message that Muhammad was giving to the Meccans but were adamantly refuted within early Meccan revelations including in Surah 69:40-41, “That this is Verily the word of an honored messenger; It is not the word Of a poet: Little it is Ye believe!”

Whereas accusations such as this were the first levels of persecution that Muhammad faced when preaching his religious message, there soon came violent threats against the converts to Islam, political boycotts of Muhammad’s followers that were merchants, and even an alleged plot to assassinate Muhammad. This only became more prevalent once Muhammad began amassing a larger community of followers in Mecca and began challenging the Quraysh leaders who were in charge of the Ka’ba and the trade circles within Mecca.

By making a claim that he was receiving revelations from God, Muhammad seemingly placed himself above the leaders of Mecca and endangered their positions of power. By the year 615, only two years after his call to public preaching (that came to him in a revelation from the Angel Gabriel) one of the opponents of Muhammad’s message, named Abu-Jahl, began to establish economic sanctions against the Muslim community of Mecca—including a report that Abu Bakr (the first caliph after Muhammad’s death)

71 Montgomery W. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 117. “It was the wicked Abu-Jahl who used to incite the men of Quraysh against them (the Muslims). When he heard of the conversion of a man of high birth with powerful friends, he criticized him vigorously and put him to shame. ‘You have left your father’s religion,’ he said, ‘although he is a better man than you; we shall make your prudence appear folly and your judgment unsound, and we shall bring your honor low.’ If he was a merchant, he said, ‘By God, we shall see that your goods are not sold and that your capital is lost’. If he was an uninfluential person, he beat him and incited people against him.”

72 Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 150.
would lose nearly 35,000 dirhams between the time that he converted and the time the community migrated to Medina in 622 C.E.\textsuperscript{73} Under the leadership of Abu-Jahl, Meccan tribes opposing Muhammad’s message would form an alliance and boycotted Muhammad, the early converts to Islam, and Muhammad’s uncle’s Hashim tribe (that had been offering Muhammad protection).\textsuperscript{74}

As a result of these economic sanctions and physical threats, and after the death of his uncle Ali Talib, Muhammad chose to migrate his community to the city of Yathrib (later changed to Medina) they would be free to practice their faith without persecution and oppression. Other faults of Meccan society that was at the forefront of the early Islamic message included social injustices and worshiping of many gods at the Ka’ba (which housed over 360 different gods at the time). This became extremely problematic since Muhammad claimed the structure had been established by Ishmael and Abraham centuries prior and should only be where the worship of the One God took place. One of the examples of Muhammad’s social critique of the Meccan society can be found in Surah 93:9-11, “As for the orphan, oppress not, As for the beggar, refuse not, As for thy Lord’s mercy, expatiate.”\textsuperscript{75} This helps demonstrate that early on in Muhammad’s life as a prophet there was high concern about the injustice befalling Meccans as well as that he believed his religious movement would resolve those issues and bring the society back to worshiping the one true God.

The early disagreements with the Meccan leaders and Muhammad’s desire to migrate his community away from persecution and oppression to a region where they could freely

\textsuperscript{73} Montgomery W. Watt, \textit{Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman.} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961.).

\textsuperscript{74} Watt, \textit{Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman}, 77.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 31.
practice their religion would later be referenced and used as an example for how Muslims should conduct themselves when facing similar threats over the course of history. Such an example has once again been used, discussed in chapter 4, by the Islamic State with how they are claiming, “The first priority is to perform Hijrah from wherever you are to the Islamic State, from dar ul-kufr (land of disbelief) to dar ul-Islam (the land of Islam).” Here, in a similar manner to Muhammad’s migration to Medina, there has been a call for “pious” Muslims to leave a land where they are oppressed to a land where they are welcomed and can practice their religion without fears of persecution from governments. It would only be once the community lived in Medina that the focus of Muhammad’s message would turn toward political questions as well as warfare with the Quraysh leaders of Mecca.

Looking at the Qur’an and the early Meccan period (610-622), we discover that while the earliest Surahs discussed a broad range of spiritual themes—one major one was the coming Day of Judgment. Carl Ernst, for example, attempted to develop a more complete understanding of not only when revelations were given to Muhammad (in Mecca or Medina), but has also attempted to pull out the major themes of each Surah. Ernst’s analysis highlighted that it was during the early Meccan years that Muhammad’s revelations gravitated toward end time speculations and a certainty of the coming Day of Judgement where the non-believers and pagans would be punished. The fact that the very structure of the Qur’an, from longest Surah to shortest, is composed of early Meccan Surahs, mid-late Meccan Surahs, and Medinan Surahs made such an analysis no easy task. Yet by looking apocalyptic references in these early Surahs alongside what was occurring to the community while in Mecca, there is evidence that Muhammad and his

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76 Dabiq 2:3
early followers were at least discussing an approaching Day of Judgement in line with high levels of religious persecution and economic oppression.

It would be impossible to prove such with absolute certainty, but it does become more plausible when analyzing the feelings and fears of the early Muslim community in Mecca alongside the revelations that were being given to Muhammad during this time period. William Montgomery Watt, in his extended work on the biography of Muhammad, theorizes that the “new religious movement of Islam must somehow or other have risen out of the conditions in Mecca in Muhammad’s time” and that “a new religion cannot come into being without a sufficient motive.”\(^\text{77}\) What this motive was, whether a demand for social justice or a strong belief in an approaching Day of Judgement, may never be entirely discovered, but Watt’s statement clues us into reasons for why the Islamic tradition was able to spread so quickly.

It is through this reasoning that there has recently been an increase in arguments that Muhammad may have seen himself as the final warner of the things to come.\(^\text{78}\) One of the earliest revelations to Muhammad is thought to have been “O though wrapped up (In a mantle!) Arise and deliver thy warning! And thy Lord Do thou glorify And thy garments Keep free from stain! And all abomination shun! Nor expect, in giving, Any increase (for thyself)! But, for thy Lord’s (Cause) Be patient and constant! Finally, when the Trumpet is sounded, That will be—that Day—A Day of Distress—Far from easy For those without Faith.”\(^\text{79}\)

In this light, not only was Muhammad bringing a warning to the Meccan society of their actions, but also insists there would be a repercussion for those who deny his


\(^{78}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{79}\) *Qur’an* 74:1-10
warning on the Day of Judgement. Such an underlining theme of Muhammad’s earliest message, while debated amongst scholars, provides additional understanding for how Muhammad may have been viewing the society around him and that they would be soon punished during Final Hour. This is not to imply that there were not also other major themes and motivations behind the earliest revelations—such as the oneness of God, power of God, role of prophets, etc.—but that one major theme during the early Meccan period was discussing the Day of Judgement and punishment to those who deny the reality of the one God.

Watt, however, does hypothesize that there may have already been an occurring shift in thinking in Mecca during the decades prior to Muhammad’s first revelation, and this was due in large part to the influx of trade occurring in the region.\(^8\) Watt speculates that the development of the Islamic tradition may have been influenced by material changes to the society, “from a pastoral, nomadic economy to a mercantile one…The essential situation out of which Islam emerged was the contrast and conflict between the Meccans nomadic outlook and attitudes and the new material environment in which they found themselves.”\(^9\) This line of thinking, however, may be a result of more modern approaches and skepticism of the energy and appeal of apocalyptic belief in communities under high levels of oppression and persecution.

Brown counters and argues that the development and use of apocalyptic speculation could have been one of the only ways to generate a religious revolution in the Arabian Peninsula during the seventh century. He writes, “to start a new civilization is not to introduce some refinement in higher culture but to change the imagination of the

\(^9\) Ibid., 49.
masses.”\textsuperscript{82} For scholars such as Brown, there would have needed to be a major inspiration for early followers of Muhammad to spread their message. The religious transformation of Meccan society should not be simplified to being exclusively the result of economic innovations and influx of trade on the region, but may have also been largely influenced by the religious undertones of Muhammad’s message. In a similar thought Yücesoy contends that, “Despite their manifest religious character, messianic beliefs are actually this-worldly and…criticize the existing social and political order and the way that power is distributed in society, and demand an overhaul of society.”\textsuperscript{83} As we will later discover, the appeal of apocalyptic speculation can be quite empowering to pockets of believers under the weight of oppression who view their society as a failure and in need of drastic change.

Ernst’s separation and dissection of Surahs in the Qur’an, by when they were revealed, has helped create a new discussion of the message of Muhammad in the first decade of his Prophethood by highlighting that the Day of Judgement was a common theme. Ernst additionally points out that it is during these early Meccan Surahs that the coming Final Hour was described as “a vision to masterfully display not only a transforming vision of divine punishment of the iniquitous cities of the past but also the pure vision of reward and punishment in the events at the end of time.”\textsuperscript{84} Some scholars have even recently suggested that an immediate belief in the end of world may help explain unsolved questions plaguing the Islamic tradition since the death of Muhammad—especially why it was that he did not openly choose a successor during his

\textsuperscript{82} Brown, “The Apocalypse of Islam,” 169.
\textsuperscript{83} Yücesoy, Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam, 136.
\textsuperscript{84} Carl W. Ernst, How to Read the Qur’an: A New Guide, with Select Translations (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 89.
lifetime.\textsuperscript{85}

What these scholars have done in their groundbreaking research is provide a fresh and innovative approach for understanding not only the social conditions that the Islamic tradition may have developed under, but also why apocalyptic speculation may have become an integral proponent of the tradition’s projection and the literatures written after the death of Muhammad. Yet it remains important to note that the Qur’an, while being the earliest literature of the first Muslim community, remains partial in describing how the end of the world was going to occur. As will be shown below, the majority of the details and characteristics of Islamic eschatology developed from extra-Qur’anic sources such as the hadith collections and Kitab-al-Fitan. Before continuing onto this point I use Rudi Paret’s summary for what the apocalypse looks like within the Qur’an:

The earth begins to move violently. It staggers, quakes, and is crushed and flattened. It brings forth what is inside of it and empties itself. Like a mirage the mountains assume variable forms. They collapse, are like teased wool and disintegrate into sand and dust. Heaven will be like molten metal and rent asunder, split open and full of gaping holes. The sun will be coiled up. The moon darkened…Indeed the images of the events on the last day…have been designed and formulated with the intention to shock the audience, to foreshadow the terror that, at some time in the future, on the last day, will seize all of creation.\textsuperscript{86}

I use this summary to highlight the major details within the Qur’anic narrative of the end times. Most notably that destruction and Judgment will “seize all of creation,” which implies that no individual will be able to avoid the ever approaching Day of Judgement and that they will be either rewarded or punished according to their deeds. This is a similar concept that the Islamic State expresses within its own apocalyptic narrative, where ISIS openly discussed in Dabiq that there is now no longer a “grayzone” among

\textsuperscript{85} Cook, \textit{Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic}, 4.
\textsuperscript{86} Ernst, \textit{How to Read the Qur’an}, 89-90.
the world’s population. According to this dissolution of the “grayzone” in the Islamic State’s narrative the Final Hour does not allow for any level indecisiveness on the part of the individual. In a similar manner the Islamic State has constructed an apocalyptic narrative that forces the individual to decide between belief and dis-belief and that they will be punished accordingly.

Another important facet in Paret’s summary is on the emphasis of natural and cosmological events as being signs of the end of the world. There remains no mention of a fitna amongst Muslims, the Dajjal, wars against Christians, or the killing of apostates, Jews, and non-believers. Yet all of these details have since become integral components of Islamic apocalyptic literature, both in the classic sources as well as in modern novels in the 20th century. The inherent lack of discussion within the Qur’an on these subjects highlights the influence extra-Quranic sources have had on Islamic eschatology, and has offered apocalyptic authors the ability to interpret and reinterpret a vast amount of extra-Quranic materials to fit their own narrative.

The Apocalypse and Extra-Qur’anic Sources

The inherent lack of detail on the signs of the Hour found in the Qur’an and the sudden death of Muhammad may have been the leading reasons behind the gradual increase in extra-Qur’anic eschatological writings to develop in the three centuries following 632 C.E. Particularly within the Sunni Tradition the death of Muhammad meant that there could be no additional revelations, prophets, or prophecies in the world. Since this is the traditional understanding from the Sunni tradition, it remains reasonable that the earliest Muslim communities may have still been anticipating the coming Day of
Judgement in the years following Muhammad’s death. This may have even been more so with the circulation of a hadith claiming that Muhammad told his followers asking about the Final Hour, “If this young boy lives, he may not grow very old till (he would see) the Last Hour coming to you.”

If there were still apocalyptic speculations present in the Muslim community they may have been anticipating it would occur sooner rather than later, and would have been viewing everything in the world as being signs that the end was near. What is clear is that details such as where the final battles would take place and the identity of the Daijjaal are entirely absent from the Qur’an and must have developed in extra-Qur’anic sources. These missing details were, as we now know, later inserted into the Islamic eschatological narrative and over the course of history have become essential details to how the Final Hour was going to occur. These additions were in large part a result of hadith (sayings or examples of the Prophet Muhammad) collections of Muhammad ibn Isma’il al-Bukhari (b. 809), Abu Dawud (b.817) and Abu al-Husayn Muslim (b. 816), and from Nu’aym ibn Hammad’s (b. 771) Kitab al-Fitan.

Scholars and Muslims alike have historically viewed the early hadith collections of Bukhari, Dawud, and Muslim as the leading authentic and authoritative works that were collected during the first centuries after the death of Muhammad. All three of these divide a vast amount of narratives and supposed sayings coming from either Muhammad or his early followers in order to separate the most authentic accounts from those that were thought to be less accurate. The hadiths deemed more authentic typically gained a

87 Sahih Muslim 54:173
88 Cook, Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature, 185.
89 Filiu and DeBevoise, Apocalypse in Islam, 13.
90 Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 24.
91 Cook, Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature, 7.
higher level of authority within the Islamic tradition due to possessing a stronger isnad (chain of transmission). The isnad traces itself back to the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, or an early companion of his, through a variety of witnesses who claim to either have heard it directly from Muhammad or from someone else who did. For example, with the hadith mentioned above, the isnad would be “Anas reported that a person asked Allah's Messenger as to when the Last Hour would come.”

In this manner the more closely an isnad was to either Muhammad or an early companion the more authenticity and authority it received. Since these three authors became leading authorities through their collection of the most authentic hadiths, their writings on the Final Hour have also become influential and authoritative. In fact, the Islamic State’s references to the Day of Judgement tend to also be taken from the works of one or more of these men as a way of supporting their narrative. Issue 1 of Dabiq, for example, references a hadith found in Muslim’s collection,

The Last Hour would not come until the Romans would land at al-A'maq or in Dabiq. An army consisting of the best (soldiers) of the people of the earth at that time will come from Medina (to counteract them). When they will arrange themselves in ranks, the Romans would say: Do not stand between us and those (Muslims) who took prisoners from amongst us. Let us fight with them; and the Muslims would say: Nay, by Allah, we would never get aside from you and from our brethren that you may fight them. They will then fight and a third (part) of the army would run away, whom Allah will never forgive. A third (part of the army) which would be constituted of excellent martyrs in Allah's eye, would be killed and the third who would never be put to trial would win and they would be conquerors of Constantinople. And as they would be busy in distributing the spoils of war (amongst themselves) after hanging their swords by the olive trees, the Satan would cry: The Dajjal has taken your place among your family. They would then come out, but it would be of no avail. And when they would come to Syria, he would come out while they would be still preparing themselves for battle drawing up the ranks. Certainly, the time of prayer shall come and then Jesus (peace be upon him) son of Mary would descend and would lead them in prayer. When the enemy of Allah would see him, it would (disappear) just as the salt dissolves itself in water and if he (Jesus) were not to confront them at all,

92 Sahih Muslim Book 54:174
even then it would dissolve completely, but Allah would kill them by his hand and he would show them their blood on his lance (the lance of Jesus Christ).

This particular hadith was also a major point of emphasis in Nu’aym’s Kitab al-Fitan and has since become an integral proponent of the A’maq Cycle. The cycle receives its name from the piece of land that the final battles between the Romans (Byzantines or Christians) and Muslims would take place. Included in it is also mention of the Dajjal, three groups of Muslims that will exist during the Final Hour, and the return of Jesus (Isa). This insertion into Islamic eschatology becomes especially important due to the notion that the Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative seems to be gravitating around this A’maq Cycle and makes constant references to its narration on how the end of the world is going to occur. According to Cook, the A’maq Cycle is “is fundamental to the study of Muslim apocalyptic, since the basic story line is repeated in most of the major traditions.”

Cook’s point highlights the continued influence that the early hadiths have had over time on Islamic eschatology and even today remains so with ISIS’s apocalyptic narrative.

As this hadith highlights, there was a rapid expansion of detail for how the end of the world would occur between what is found in the Qur’an’s narrative compared to what is found in hadiths and Kitab al-Fitan. This example helps demonstrate there being an early desire by early Muslims to fill in the missing gaps of the Qur’an and may have been a direct result from the political situation of the time this cycle was being constructed. Cook notes, “It is rather interesting to speculate that the Qur’anic prohibition [on predicting the time of the Hour] may have led to the development of apocalyptic traditions in another way, since merely watching the signs and portents of the end was not

93 Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 49.
prohibited, and even encouraged, and so this could have assisted the legitimation of this activity at its beginning.”\textsuperscript{94} In this way the early Muslim communities would have been expecting that the end could occur at any moment and would have possibly been viewing everything around them as being signs of its nearness.

It would seem that the titles these three hadith collectors gave their books on apocalyptic sayings and narratives tended to only further emphasize the idea that the Final Hour was coming. For example, Bukhari titled his section of apocalyptic hadiths and sayings \textit{Book of Afflictions and the End of the World}, while Dawud titled his \textit{Kitab al-malhamah}, and Muslim gave his the title of \textit{The Book of Tribulations and Portents of the Last Hour} and devoted nearly 143 hadiths for discussing signs of the Final Hour.\textsuperscript{95} Within these books were the sayings and accounts of the Prophet Muhammad and his earliest companions. The amount of additions brought to Islamic eschatology through these collections is quite numerous and remains by itself an entire realm of study and analysis, but I will make mention of some of the lasting additions they developed that have become points of interest for later apocalyptic authors.

One of these major contributions was a detailed account of the character of the Dajjal. The Dajjal, while not mentioned in the \textit{Qur’an}, has become one of the most referenced figures throughout Islamic apocalyptic writings. It is central to note that all three of these apocalyptic collections make reference to the Dajjal as well as his physical characteristics—which would later be adopted by modern authors when attempting to argue who the Dajjal would be. The most noteworthy account, and perhaps the first to be recorded, on the Dajjal comes from Bukhari’s \textit{Book of Afflictions and the End of the World}.\textsuperscript{94 95}

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{95} Filiu and DeBevoise, \textit{Apocalypse in Islam}, 15.
World:

The Prophet mentioned the Masih Ad-Dajjal in front of the people saying, Allah is not one-eyed while Masih Ad-Dajjal is blind in the right eye and his eye looks like a bulging out grape. While sleeping near the Ka`ba last night, I saw in my dream a man of brown color the best one can see amongst brown color and his hair was long that it fell between his shoulders. His hair was lank and water was dribbling from his head and he was placing his hands on the shoulders of two men while circumambulating the Ka`ba. I asked, 'Who is this?' They replied, 'This is Jesus, son of Mary.' Behind him I saw a man who had very curly hair and was blind in the right eye, resembling Ibn Qatan (i.e. an infidel) in appearance. He was placing his hands on the shoulders of a person while performing Tawaf around the Ka`ba. I asked, 'Who is this? 'They replied, 'The Masih, Ad-Dajjal.'

Within this same collection from Bukhari another narration of the Dajjal reads, “The Prophet said, No prophet was sent but that he warned his followers against the one-eyed liar (Ad-Dajjal). Beware! He is blind in one eye, and your Lord is not so, and there will be written between his (Ad-Dajjal's) eyes (the word) Kafir (i.e., disbeliever).” Yet another account of this figure reads, “Once Allah's Messenger stood amongst the people, glorified and praised Allah as He deserved and then mentioned the Dajjal saying, I warn you against him (i.e. the Dajjal) and there was no prophet but warned his nation against him. No doubt, Noah warned his nation against him but I tell you about him something of which no prophet told his nation before me. You should know that he is one-eyed, and Allah is not one-eyed.”

Perhaps one of the leading reasons that the accounts of this Dajjal from Bukhari have become so authoritative and re-cycled within the Islamic tradition has been a result of coming from the mouth of the Prophet Muhammad. Muslim’s collection would later receive a large amount of respect and would become another leading authority on the

96 Sahih al-Bukhari Book 60:110
97 Sahih al-Bukhari Book 60:12
98 Sahih al-Bukhari Book 60: 12
subject of the end times and the role of the Dajjal by way of his collection being
approved by Bukhari and being able to “expand the chronology of the major signs and
portents of the Hour.”99 Cook further notes, “Theologically the Dajjal defines evil and
everything that he does is diametrically opposed to God’s purposes on earth.”100 Through
these hadiths the Dajjal’s appearance would adopt retaining the word *kufr* on his forehead
so that all Muslims would be able recognize him as being evil and something to avoid.
These early descriptions of the Dajjal would help provide later literatures, especially
modern novels in the late 20th century, the notion that the Dajjal would be an infidel and
opposing the laws of God.

Although the Dajjal’s appearance first occurs in Burkari’s *Book of Afflictions and the
End of the World*, the Dajjal’s appearance would actually only become known as a sign
of the Hour in Dawud’s *Kitab al-Malhamah* and Muslim’s *The Book of Tribulations and
Portents of the Last Hour*. In these two works the Dajjal “acquires considerably greater
stature” as being a major sign of the Hour and helps articulate how he has since become
such an integral figure in Islamic eschatology.101

We were sitting in the shade of the chamber of the Messenger of Allah discussing
(something) and when we mentioned the last hour, our voices rose high. The
Messenger of Allah said: The last hour will not come or happen until there appear
ten signs before it the rising of the sun in its place of setting, the coming forth of
the beast, the coming forth of Gog and Magog, the Dajjal (Antichrist), (the
descent of) Jesus son of Mary, the smoke, and three collapses of the earth: one in
the west, one in the east, and one in the Arabian Peninsula. The last of that will be
the emergence of a fire from Yemen, from the lowest part of Aden, and drive
mankind to their place of assembly.102

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100 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 101
101 Ibid., 101.
102 Abu Dawud  Book 39: 21
In this narration, opposite of what was discussed before, the Prophet Muhammad warns his early community that the end of the world would not occur until after a series of events unfolded. These events, while most are found in the Qur’an, now suddenly include the appearance of the Dajjal as being a sign to the people. Along with this Dawud also made mention that, “The Prophet said: The greatest war, the conquest of Constantinople and the coming forth of the Dajjal (Antichrist) will take place within a period of seven months.”^{103}

Yet another addition made to Islamic eschatology that would be formed in these hadith collections would be the narration of the Euphrates River. As will be pointed out in chapter 2, this hadith would receive a revitalization of attention during the 20th century with the oil boom in the Middle East. This hadith soon became a major sign of the Hour that would become apparent for Muslims to witness and prepare for the Day of Judgment, “The Last Hour would not come before the Euphrates uncovers a mountain of gold, for which people would fight. Ninety-nine out of each one hundred would die but every man amongst them would say that perhaps he would be the one who would be saved (and thus possess this gold).”^{104}

These few of hundreds of examples help emphasize how later literatures began adding additional signs and narrations to what was provided in the Qur’an. These signs now included social, economic, and military happenings that Muslims could begin to point to as evidence that the end of the world was appearing. The addition of the Dajjal into Islamic eschatology would give birth to a vast amount of speculations and anxieties on who the Dajjal would be and where he would come from in the proceeding centuries after

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^{103} Abu Dawud Book 39:5
^{104} Sahih Muslim Book 54: 38
these hadith collections. As we will see in Chapter 4, the Dajjal has now become a staple point of the Islamic State’s own apocalyptic narrative where they constantly cite hadiths to support its claims. These hadiths, alongside the writings of Nu’aym Ibn Hammad, would open up the floodgates for further additions to begin being made to Islamic eschatology—including most importantly who would be fought prior to the Hour. More notably, we find it is the social and political environment Kitab al-Fitan was written under that would influence Islamic eschatology and help develop the A’maq Cycle into one of the most cited narrations of the Final Hour, including today with the Islamic State.

Nu’aym Ibn Hammad’s Kitab al-Fitan

Nu’aym Ibn Hammad’s contribution to the development of Islamic eschatology comes primarily from his work Kitab al-Fitan, which shared many of the hadiths collected by the authors mentioned above. Nu’aym was considered a part of the learned religious class of his time, was born in Khorasan, studied in Iraq and Hijaz, and eventually moved to Egypt to become “one of the prominent hadith scholars.” Kitab al-Fitan is now thought of as being constructed between the years of 831-844 C.E. and is thought to have possessed the prophecies of the first two hundred years of Islamic history in chronological order starting with the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. This work, according to Cook, “is of central importance to the study of Muslim apocalyptic. By virtue of the early date of composition, and the fact that he worked in Syria…the key area of apocalyptic speculation…Nu’aym should be considered the collector of first and

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105 Yücesoy, Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam, 11-12.
106 Ibid., 12.
second-century AH apocalyptic.”¹⁰⁷

Cook later points out that Nu’aym’s work was even more important for the development of Islamic eschatology for how it provided additional accounts of end time narratives that were left out of the hadith collections of Dawud, Muslim, and Burkari. In this way Kitab al-Fitan was able to include in it many of the narrations and sayings that the hadith collections found less authoritative or accurate. He notes, “Without Nu’aym, we could suspect this process [of removing certain narrations on the Final Hour] had taken place, but could prove it only with much more difficulty.”¹⁰⁸ Yücesoy also points out the importance of Kitab al-Fitan by claiming “without [it] the majority of prophecies that it contains would have been lost, and many of the details of the civil war would have been unknown to the modern reader.”¹⁰⁹

In this way Kitab al-Fitan is not only important to the materials it preserved dealing with apocalyptic narrations, but was also one of the only texts to survive that possessed a large amount of information on the civil wars that were occurring during the first two centuries of Islamic history. In this way the text should be understood as vital not only for apocalyptic literature but also for modern scholars attempting to re-construct the historical events of that specific time period. For this reason Yücesoy claims that apocalyptic literature from this time period should be understood beyond just being messianic speculations since they often are “a reflection of a person’s position on social and political matters...[that] offer information about the speakers mind with little mediation.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 24.
¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 24.
¹⁰⁹ Yücesoy, Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam, 12.
¹¹⁰ Ibid., 16.
Being an extra-Qur’anic text outside the realm of even the hadith collections places Kitab al-Fitan into a unique area of influence on the development of Islamic eschatology. The amount of additions that flooded Islamic eschatology by way of Nu’aym’s work remains quite extensive, and as mentioned earlier, his narratives have been spread across nearly every cycle of Cook’s own analysis of Islamic apocalyptic literature. More importantly “Muslim messianic and apocalyptic sensibility developed a discourse through supplementing and interpreting the Qur’an in light of the political and sociocultural transformation in the first two centuries after the death of Muhammad” and this proved to be especially true with Kitab al-Fitan. In this manner, of being outside of the authority of hadiths and the Qur’an, Kitab al-Fitan’s influence may have set the example for how later apocalyptic literatures would begin to look at a variety of texts and sources for constructing their narratives. With Kitab al-Fitan came the inclusion of narrations that were not limited to the traditional sources of authority within the Islamic tradition.

Nu’aym’s greatest contribution, however, especially for ISIS’s apocalyptic narrative, comes directly from the Kitab al-Fitan’s expansion of what is discussed in the A’maq Cycle. While using the hadiths mentioned above, this text also was able to incorporate the political and sociocultural issues that were occurring during the time of his writing into additional facets of what will occur during the Final Hour. Since the A’maq Cycle seems to be what the Islamic State has adopted into its own narrative, it becomes more essential to look at the additions Nu’aym provided to the broader scope of Islamic eschatology as well as why these were added. Similar to how the early Meccan Surahs heavily discussed the Day of Judgment due possibly to the society it had developed under, the social and

111 Ibid., 17.
political environment of Nu’aym’s own life further stresses how Islamic apocalyptic literature tends to develop in times of widespread anxiety, persecution, or warfare.

Cook places Nu’aym’s contributions to the A’maq Cycle as being a part of the Historical Apocalypses category because they tend to possess “recognizable historical personalities, and a historical sequence of events that [eventually] leaves reality at a particular point and moves into the realm of fantasy.” 112 With this understanding the A’maq Cycle seems to have developed as a part of the continuous warfare arising against the Byzantine Empire as well as the civil wars and Abbasid revolution during the first two centuries after the death of Muhammad. Cook points to one specific detail of the cycle as supporting his claim, “You will launch three raids on Constantinople. As to the first, you will meet tribulation and hardship. As to the second, there will be a truce between you and them (the Byzantines), such that the Muslims will build in it mosques and you will raid together with them beyond Constantinople…”113

By analyzing this part of Kitab al-Fitan’s contribution to the A’maq Cycle, Cook claims the first raid stems from historical reality and was a representation of Mu’awiya’s failed attempt to conquer the Byzantines in 679, which then resulted in the Muslims paying a tribute to the Byzantines.114 The latter details of this narration, for Cook, are understood as being a part of this unknown future but are to help calm any anxiety that may be widespread in his society. The building of mosques in Constantinople are meant to emphasize that the Muslim empires would soon be able to take conquer Constantinople to the degree that they will begin building mosques within the city. The final detail on raiding together with “them beyond Constantinople” then goes on to state that the

112 Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 34.
113 Ibid., 53.
114 Ibid., 53.
Christians and Muslims will team up to defeat a common enemy before fighting each other prior to the Final Hour.

Then the Byzantines will send to you asking for a truce and you will make truce with them. On that day a woman will cross the pass to Syria safely and the city of Caesarea in Anatolia will be built (rebuilt). During the truce al-Kufa will be flattened like leather—this is because they refused assistance to the Muslims of Syria [thought to be referencing Iraqi Muslims], and God knows whether, in addition to this desertion, there was another event that made attacking them permissible. You will ask the Byzantines for assistance against them, and they will assist you, and you will go until you camp with them on a plain with hills. One of the Christians will say: ‘By means of our cross you obtained the victory; therefore give us our share of the spoils, of the women and children.’ You will refuse to give them of the women and children, so they will fight and then go and return [to the Byzantine Empire] and prepare for the final apocalyptic battle (malhamah)’ with another version ending slightly different, “You have only gained victory over them because of the cross, and the Muslims say: ‘Nay, because of Allah and His messenger we have obtained victory over them.’ It goes back and forth between them, whereupon the Byzantines become anger, and one of the Muslims rises up and breaks the cross.115

In this way, Nu’aym becomes one of the leading contributors to the development of the A’maq Cycle, which is rooted in historical events while also dwelling in fantasy and future speculations. The regions of conquest and the enemies fought within it are directly plucked from the historical and political happenings of Nu’aym’s time period and are then re-approached. According to Kitab al-Fitan, the Byzantines (Christians) would first team up with Syrian Muslims in order to defeat a group of Iraqi Muslims that both groups were combatting at the time. After their victory, the Byzantines suddenly attempt to give credit to the cross (Jesus) whereas the Muslims refuse to give the glory to anything other than God. Cook notes that such a notion of “hatred of the cross” would later become a “recurring polemical theme throughout Muslim apocalyptic” and may have resulted directly from this narration.116

115 Ibid., 50.
116 Ibid., 51.
As for the Iraqi Muslims that are alluded to in this narration, Cook claims that their role was perhaps pointed to in order to highlight a possible “division between the two groups of Muslims so deep that the Muslims of Syria turn[ed] to the Byzantines for aid in punishing the Iraqis.”¹¹７ This latter aspect of the narrative is speculated to be one of the leading reasons that later apocalyptic literatures would begin to speculate that the Final Hour would occur when there was widespread strife amongst the Muslims community.

In a similar light, another example of one of many additions that Kitab al-Fitan provided to Islamic eschatology was this notion that fitna would be a major sign of the Hour. According to Nu’aym there would be four fitnahs (civil strife/war) occurring within the Muslim community prior to the Day of Judgement, three of which had already occurred during his time of writing. These included “the caliphate of Ali...Ibn al-Zuayr’s revolt in 683…the revolt of the Abbasids between 747-750…and the last [being the appearance] of the Dajjal.”¹¹８ For this reason Cook states that early on in Islamic history there may have been similar notions shared between the words fitna and malhamah. This, he finds, would help explain how the word fitna, which had no Qur’anic interpretation of occurring towards the end of days could have begun to be discussed as such. He argues, “In contrast to the word fitna, the term malhamah appears to be attached for the most part, to the capture of Constantinople or the battles in the A’maq. It would be fair to say that in many cases a malhamah is a specific type of apocalyptic battle within the genre of fitan. Of course, it cannot be denied that in many cases the two terms are used interchangeably, especially in the early literature of Nu’aym and his

¹¹７ Ibid., 51.
¹¹８ Ibid., 40.
While this short analysis only scratched the surface of the additions that Nu’aym’s work and the hadith collections provided for Islamic eschatology they were essential to briefly mention. *Kitab al-Fitan* would become one of the first sources outside the *Qur’an* and hadith collections to play a major role on the trajectory on how Islamic apocalyptic literatures would be written. Nu’aym’s inclusion of differing narrations alongside the hadiths collected by Muslim, Burkari, and Dawud allowed for his work to become one of the leading sources of authority on end time narrations. Nu’aym also became one of the first authors to write an apocalyptic text by way of incorporating the political and sociocultural events occurring around him into his narration—a tactic that has since been mimicked constantly. His ability to work from outside the confines of the *Qur’an* and hadith collections would be mirrored in apocalyptic literatures over the course of the next thousand years. Yet it would not be until the end of the 19th century in British colonized Sudan that one man would combine these classical narrations of the Christians/Byzantines with the increase of Western influence in Muslim societies in order to stir a violent revolution that would send shockwaves across the world.

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119 Ibid., 23.
Chapter 2: Modernity: Apocalyptic Literature and Messianic Revolutions

In a millennial momentum, common to all apocalyptic trends, a crucial shift occurs from dormant aspiration to keen ambition. This turning point invariably pertains to crossing a psychological barrier, one which divides adherence to the established belief system from an experiences of rebirth and in turn discovering a communal identity with like-minded individuals…In the visions of the End we observe the ideals of generations, utopian dreams and nightmare, fanatical obsessions with providential plan, and prospects for a regressive or progressive future; a mirror to societies’ innate ears and aspirations.\textsuperscript{120}

Abbas Amanat

Understanding the earliest developments of Islamic eschatology, the environment they developed in, and the continual influence each had on the succeeding centuries after Muhammad’s death provides the foundational terms, battle scenarios, and geographical locations of interest for Muslims over the course of the next twelve centuries. While slight changes occurred periodically due to certain historical events, such as the crusades and Mongol invasion, it would not be until the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century that an unexpected and widespread alteration would occur within Islamic eschatology. The arrival of Western colonialization, specifically in the Middle East and North Africa, re-ignited the end time anxieties and suspicions that had animated the early Islamic world.

With this sudden increase in anxiety, a new wave of revolutionaries and authors were able to look into any number of narratives for guidance and inspiration. By citing and interpreting classical sources in the wake of what was occurring around them, these revolutionaries and authors become tormented with worry that Muslims were being politically oppressed, religiously persecuted, living in an immoral world, and such was all due to the invasion of Western nations.

This chapter will demonstrate those points by discussing three revolutions that were possibly inspired by messianic speculation, the shift in how apocalyptic literature was

\textsuperscript{120} Amanat, \textit{Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi’ism}, 23-24.
written beginning at the end of the 20th century, and on how the literature became increasingly focused on the actions of the United States at the start of the 21st century.

The revival of apocalyptic anxiety may only have been further driven with the rapid advancement of technology over time. The development of book publishing companies in the 20th century and the creation of the Internet in the 21st century would allow any number of authors with the ability to personally interpret classic sources in order to construct their own narrative the means to reach the masses. This means for anyone and everyone to become an authority on end time speculation would bring with it the space for radical interpretations to arise. This would later cultivate an increase of “conspirator” undertones that insinuated that Israel, Shi’a Muslims, and/or America were a part of a worldwide agenda against the Islamic tradition. In much the same way, discussed in Chapter 4, the Islamic State’s media and own end time narrative would adopt a variety of characteristics from these modern literatures—including this speculation of a worldwide agenda being led by the Dajjal against the Islamic tradition.

The Islamic State’s narrative, however, did not appear out of thin air but rather developed from the changes modern apocalyptic literature experienced during the late 20th century. By noting instances of apocalyptic speculation that led to revolution and the development of the literature it seems that the revival of end time speculation, Western colonialization, and violent jihadist movements arose virtually at the same time. Yet these three issues are rarely studied alongside each other, and this, as is the case with ISIS’s apocalyptic narrative, results in an incomplete analysis of what was occurring. With the historical apocalyptic literatures discussed in the previous chapter providing insight into the historical context for the narratives being cited and re-interpreted by the Islamic State
today, it is only from understanding the development and evolution in how these classical
sources would begin to be read, interpreted, and by whom such was being done that helps
situate ISIS propaganda into a modern extensive line of Islamic eschatology. Now
focused around notions involving the state of Israel, the Dajjal, and Western influence in
the Middle East, the Islamic State constructed a view of the world that could only be
resolved through use of force.

Modern Revolutions and the Sudanese Mahdi

While 1979 may be where the most recent explosion of apocalyptic speculation
leading to a revolution, there are previous examples during European colonization in the
19th century. In 1881, after nearly sixty years of British colonial influence in Sudan,
Muhammad Ahmad ibn ‘Abd Allah (also known as Shaykh Muhammad Sharif) tapped
into the widespread discontent with British influence on Sudan’s Muslim society by way
of apocalyptic jihad. The impacts that Western colonialization had on Sudan’s
government, trade, and society became leading causes of unrest in Sudan at the time.
Muhammad Ahmad, known as being a pious practitioner of the Islamic tradition, viewed
his society as falling away from the example of the Prophet Muhammad by adopting
Western values and customs. By studying classical apocalyptic sources, Ahmad began to
find that all the events occurring around him were pointing to the appearance of the long
awaited Mahdi who would bring justice to the world. This belief was only enhanced by
the approaching year 1300 of the Islamic Calendar, which for some signaled a pivotal
moment in Islamic history. It was during the year 1299/1881 C.E that Ahmad would
proclaim *himself* as the long awaited “Mahdi” by claiming the title was given to him by
the Prophet Muhammad in a dream.\textsuperscript{121}

Through this claimed communication with the Prophet Muhammad, Ahmad publicly proclaimed that he was given the “task of erasing the corruption and decay that plagued the Muslim community and restoring the unspoiled Islam of the Prophet’s time.”\textsuperscript{122} Possessing this outlook on the world, Ahmad judged society as being morally corrupt, due to Western influences, and in need of quickly returning to how Islamic society functioned during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Some of Ahmad’s major critiques against his society included unlawful taxes, restrictions on veiling, and government leaders being infidels disguised as pious Muslims.\textsuperscript{123} Whether or not Ahmad actually believed himself to be the Mahdi, or if it was used to legitimize his movement is not necessarily important.

What is essential to understand is that Ahmad believed that his society was decaying in front of his eyes, and that the only way to counter this was to bring sweeping changes to the nation. Perhaps the title of Mahdi was just used as a source of inspiration and recruitment, or maybe it was an actual belief of his. What is certain is that Ahmad was a major critic of the increasing British influence on Muslim societies and felt that violence had become the only option left in combatting the influence. As the scholar Abbas Amanat notes, Ahmad believed that “To rebuild the Prophet’s sharia, which has been ‘obliterated’ by the enemies of Islam, and to restore the ‘true religion,’ like Muhammad, he had to resort to the sword in order to remove not only the spurious four schools of Sunni law and to replace them with ‘pure Islamic rules’ and ‘god’s punishing limits,’ but

\textsuperscript{121} Filiu and DeBevoise, \textit{Apocalypse in Islam}, 63.
\textsuperscript{123} Amanat, \textit{Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi’ism}, 47.
also to declare jihad against the most virulent enemies of Islam.”

For Ahmad the Mahdi, violence and jihad of the sword had become the only option left for Muslims to revert back to how they are “supposed” to live. Muhammad Ahmad may have declared himself Mahdi in hopes of tempting Sudanese Muslims to an uprising against the ruling British, or perhaps he actually believed that he was in fact the Mahdi—that may never be entirely known—but what is known is that he undertook the title and engaged quite successfully in offensive violence against the established government of the time. Ahmad saw the value of tapping into apocalyptic speculation for stirring a wider revolution. Much like the Algerian “Mahdi” Bu Ziyan, who, in 1847, called for jihad of the sword against French rulers under the impression that he was the Mahdi; Ahmad was viewing the increase of Western colonialization with a messianic lens. Through this lens Ahmad argued jihad was justified “to destroy this world in order to construct the other world.”

With this line of thinking, the destruction of this world is simply the first step in the construction of the next world which is to occur after the Day of Judgement. As the Mahdi, Ahmad would theoretically have been able to justify any of his actions under the pretense that the Final Hour is approaching. Ahmad also purposely attempted to constantly mirror actions the Prophet Muhammad had done with his early community when they were persecuted by the Quraysh tribe in Mecca. In this way Ahmad would be perceived as acting as closely to the example of the Prophet as possible, legitimizing his uprising. For example, Ahmad called for a mass Hijrah (emigration) “from Aba to Qadir to the safety of the Baqqara tribes in Kordofan” in order to portray the move as “a

124 Ibid., 47.
125 Filiu and DeBevoise, Apocalypse in Islam, 63.
symbolic act of breaking with unbelievers and striking a new covenant with his ‘helpers.”

Ahmad wanted to present each of his actions as representations of the actions that the Prophet Muhammad undertook during his own time living under persecution and oppression in such a way that it allowed his followers to perceive their actions in unison with the actions of the early Muslim community.

A mass Hijrah away from “unbelievers” was not the goal for the proclaimed Mahdi but simply the first step. As the Prophet Muhammad had done over a thousand years prior, Ahmad believed that battles would be the next step in establishing the Muslim community in the region. In 1883 Ahmad’s radical call was materialized by followers taking up arms, battling against British and Egyptian forces, and earning a major victory near El-Obeid. It was there that Ahmad announced he would continue the revolution until he was leading prayer in Mecca, Medina, Cairo, and Jerusalem—echoing the regions of conquest within the classic eschatological narratives. This early victory, much like the Prophet Muhammad’s victory at the Battle of Badr, brought with it more benefits for Ahmad’s revolution and as legitimacy to his title of the messianic Mahdi who, according to prophecy, could not be defeated. The more victories Ahmad achieved, the more credible his revolution became. For it was at the Battle of Badr, outnumbered in some accounts 300 to 3,000, that Muhammad and the earliest Muslims were able to defeat the Quraysh army. Many Muslims point to the piety and trust in God’s mission possessed by those early followers as reason for their decisive victory in wake of the greatest of odds against them.

In much the same way, Ahmad’s followers may have been greatly inspired by their

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126 Amanat, Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi‘ism, 47.
127 Filiu and DeBevoise, Apocalypse in Islam, 63.
early victory. It was in 1885 that the British backed regime would collapse after the self-proclaimed Mahdi marched against the capital city of Khartoum, won a decisive victory, and executed the British Christian governor Charles Gordon. Suddenly the believability of his message—shown through these decisive victories—resonated across the Islamic world. A self-claimed Mahdi had just revolted against a Western colonial power and won, a result that sent ripple effects across the Middle East. It was shortly after this major victory, however, among rampant speculation that Ahmad could not die prior to the eschatological conquest of Jerusalem, Ahmad became ill and passed away. The territory he fought over and gained control of eventually would fall back under British/Egyptian control by the year 1889.

The sudden and unexpected death of the man claiming to be the Mahdi extinguished the apocalyptic aspirations of his followers and ended the movement as quickly as it had arisen. The revolution, however, resonated across the world and provided Western leaders new worries on what could occur amongst Muslims under the influence of apocalyptic speculation. Western nations, as well as Islamic governments, were shown firsthand the power messianic speculation could have amongst Muslim populations in colonies. By the same token, Muslim populations were shown the power that could be tapped into with apocalyptic speculation. Islamic universities and religious institutes across the Middle East, especially in Egypt, would become especially wary of this potential threat. Following the death of Ahmad, universities and governments alike began countering any predictions on when the end of the world would occur or the appearance of messianic figures.

128 Cook, "Fighting to Create the Just State: Apocalypticism in Radical Muslim Discourse." In Just Wars, Holy Wars, & Jihads, 263
129 Filiu and DeBevoise, Apocalypse in Islam, 64
For example, in 1942 a leading member of religious studies at al-Azhar attempted to discredit and extinguish the increase of apocalyptic rumor by disclaiming the “various uncertain and contradictory traditions dealing with the descent of Jesus after the appearance of Al-Dajjal.”\textsuperscript{130} Since the eschatological narrative of Jesus returning during the events of the apocalypse insists that Jesus is in Heaven waiting until the Final Hour to occur—the religious scholars of al-Azhar found it best to discredit these traditions as coming from “Jews who became Muslims” and thus they held no strong authority on Islamic eschatology.\textsuperscript{131} The notion that leading Islamic scholars were anxious about widespread speculations that the end of the world was near illustrates at least a substantial amount of the population was discussing the possibility of Jesus returning in their lifetime.

The revolution of the Sudanese Mahdi and this later declaration against speculating on the return of Jesus from leading religious leaders in Egypt highlights that apocalyptic speculation was blossoming. At the same time, there was a gradual increase of outside influences on the Middle East, especially coming from the West, and this was adding fuel to a fire that was waiting to erupt again. It would, however, not be until decades later that apocalyptic speculation would gain traction once again in the Middle East resulting in another revolution—one that was quite successful.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the deliberate effort from Islamic religious scholars may have weakened the high levels of apocalyptic speculation during the

\textsuperscript{130} Filiu and DeBevoise, \textit{Apocalypse in Islam}, 69
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 69.
beginning of the 20th century following what had happened in Sudan. The speculation, however, once again began to resonate across Islamic societies with the increase of Western influence on the region, the establishment of the state of Israel, and the increasing distrust of America’s role as a world power. The formation of the Jewish State of Israel in 1948 became one of the leading factors in the increase of apocalyptic speculation—due largely to the acceptance of Jerusalem being a place of eschatological importance. It was, however, not until the year 1979 that apocalyptic speculation hit the tipping point across the Middle East. For both Sunni and Shi’a Muslims, November 20, 1979 was, according to the Islamic calendar, the beginning of the fifteenth century and a date that some apocalyptic narratives claimed would be a pivotal moment in Islamic history.¹³²

The year would end up being a decisive one in two of the leading Islamic nations, Iran and Saudi Arabia. While the majority of examples discussed previously have dealt exclusively with Sunni apocalyptic literature, I find that the example of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 also highlights how influential millenarian belief can be on Muslim feelings of political oppression and religious persecution. While Iran’s revolution brought about sweeping changes, and whereas Saudi Arabia’s revolution was undertaken by a few hundred soldiers, both cases highlight that apocalyptic speculation has led to revolution. More importantly, both show that belief in the coming end of the world, a battle against evil, and a pushback against a perceived immoral society and government was at the forefront of the movements.

Following Khomeyni expulsion to France, supporters of his revolution began

¹³² This date, may have, been publically viewed similarly to how Americans viewed 1999 and the coming “Y2K” on January 1st, 2001.
appealing to apocalyptic speculation in a manner not seen before in hopes of ushering in a new way of life in Iran. In a public broadcast of the “Prayer for the Return of Ayatollah Khomeyni” connections were drawn between the Imam’s return to Iran and the Mahdi’s prophesized return:

The Imam must come back
So that Good will be installed on its throne,
So that Evil, betrayal, and hatred
Will disappear for ever and ever.\textsuperscript{133}

The return of Khomeini was viewed by the Iranian population as the return of God’s Law over the Laws of man—especially those of American derivation. This view of what Khomeini represented attempted to separate Iran, and perhaps the entire world, into two distinct camps—one of Good and one of Evil. The Iranian media argued the return of Khomeini was a representation of justice and morality taking over an unjust and immoral world, one that had existed under the influence of the American government. The media even later attempted to link some cosmological signs of the Hour to the revolution. For example, along with speculation that Khomeyni was the awaited Mahdi, rumors were spread that Khomeini’s face could be seen on the moon as a result of the Qur’anic sign of the Sun rising from the West.\textsuperscript{134}

This, of course, never occurred but in 1979 Khomeini returned to Iran with overwhelming support, toppling the then current regime, contested American influence on Iranian society, and founded the Islamic Republic just prior to the start of the fifteenth century of Islamic history. On November 5 Khomeini announced his movement was not only against America’s influence on Iranian politics, but was now also a part of a grander

\textsuperscript{133} Filiu and DeBevoise, \textit{Apocalypse in Islam}, 72
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 72.
scheme and eschatological battle against Satan. For Khomeini American society, morality, and government were all “the ultimate taghut [corrupter of Earth], the demonic idol associated in the Qur’an with Satan.”135 The only way to rid the Islamic world, particularly Iran, was a rebellion against the American government and the Iranian establishment that it was supporting.

For example, in his official statement about the attack on the American embassy, he declared the violence justified because “In this Revolution the Great Satan is America, which is gathering around it other satans by making loud noises—that included both the satans inside and outside Iran...Iran was enslaved by Britain and then America” and “As for the center [the U.S. embassy] occupied by our young men, I have been informed it has been a lair for espionage and plotting.”136 Khomeini’s rhetoric and appeal to his audience, we later find, is similar to how modern apocalyptic literatures were being written—including the publications of ISIS’s Dabiq.

By describing America as the Great Satan, Khomeini was able to place his revolution into a cosmological battle between Good vs. Evil, God vs. Satan, and Iran vs. America. The label of American being the Great Satan has since been continuously recycled in Iranian rhetoric discussing the United States. Such mistrust of what America represents eventually spread to encompass other nations as well, even though most were deemed allies with America. This included Saddam Hussein’s Iraq which had been given the title of “Lesser Satan.”137 Iraq, in this line of thinking, was being used as space for the widespread destabilization of the Middle East—a thought adopted by the most popular apocalyptic writers of the 1990’s.

135 Amanat, Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi’ism, 211.
136 Ibid., 199.
137 Ibid., 201.
The Siege of Mecca in 1979

Iran, however, was not the only base for a revival of apocalyptic speculation in the modern Middle East. The Sunni nation Saudi Arabia also faced a rise in millenarian speculation amongst its civilians in the years leading up to 1400 of the Islamic calendar. On November 19, 1979 just fourteen days after Khomeini’s declaration of America as the “Great Satan,” roughly two hundred to three hundred armed revolutionaries snuck into the Ka’ba, surrounded the structure through underground tunnels, and waited until the final minutes of the year 1399 to make their appearance. As those final minutes elapsed, the leader of the armed rebels, Juhayman al-Utaybi, stood next to the Ka’ba and proclaimed to those surrounding the structure that his brother-in-law, Muhammad al-Qahtani, was the long-awaited Mahdi and was going to bring justice to the world.\textsuperscript{138} Citing the decaying morality of the Muslim world, negative influences coming from Western society, and that the leaders of Saudi Arabia did not follow the Shari’a Law, Juhayman alleged that the end of the world was at hand and that Mecca must first be cleansed to await the Final Hour.

One account claims Juhayman stated, “The good man is here with us, and he will bring justice to Earth after it had been filled with Injustice. If anyone doubts, come here to check. We are all your brothers!” before finishing the speech with “In the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful, here is the awaited Mahdi. Pledge ba’ya (allegiance) to Brother Muhammad Abdullah al-Qurayshi.”\textsuperscript{139} According to Juhayman, his brother-in-law not only shared the name of the Mahdi, Muhammad Abdullah, but his lineage even could be traced back to the Prophet Muhammad—both qualifications for who would

\textsuperscript{138} Filiu and DeBevoise, Apocalypse in Islam, 74.
become the Mahdi. Juhayman had spent a significant amount of time reading the classical sources as direction for his mission. He remained under the impression that the Islamic tradition had increasingly become corrupt and was falling away from the example of the Prophet Muhammad to the degree that the next sign to come would be the appearance of the Mahdi. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had represented the final breaking away from the example of the Prophet and thus no longer possessed the allegiance of any Muslims even though they controlled the two holiest cities of Islam—Mecca and Medina.

Juhayman’s history begins with a man possessing strong anti-Saudi beliefs, a father that had rebelled against the Kingdom in the 1920’s, and that he would eventually be exiled to the Arabian Desert in 1977 due to his increasingly public opposition of the Saudi ruling family. It was while he was exiled in the desert that Juhayman would begin to write a series of eleven letters discussing signs of the Hour. The most popular letter was titled Tribulations [fitan], the Mahdi, the Descent of Jesus, and the Signs of the Hour, and claimed that all signs of the Hour were “without exception associated with the Arabian Peninsula.” Linking his belief mostly to the hadiths collection of Abu Dawud, Juhayman became convinced that the Mahdi would appear in Mecca in response to the “hypocrisy” of the Saudi rulers and the corruption of Islamic society from outside influences. Juhayman notes at one point that prior to the appearance of the Mahdi a “great discord will occur, and Muslims will be drifting away from the religion,” a detail highlighting the purpose of fitna during the Final Hour.

It was also during this year that his brother had been arrested and jailed because he

140 Trofimov, The Siege of Mecca, 50.
141 Filiu and DeBevoise, Apocalypse in Islam, 75.
142 Trofimov, The Siege of Mecca, 46.
was one among many of Juhayman’s supporters. The harsh crackdown on the supporters of Juhayman led to further distrust of the established government and Muslim rulers. There are reports that Juhayman condemned the Saudi kingdom by stating “How is it possible to declare jihad against the states of the infidels when we have ambassadors in their countries and they have in ours ambassadors, experts and professors? We should not be deceived by the ornaments. How can we propagate Islam when our professors are Christians? Is it possible to raise the flag of jihad when the banner of Christianity is flapping next to the banner of the faith of One God?” For Juhayman, the Saudi leaders had lost their legitimacy by becoming close allies with ‘infidel’ nations and “Christian” nations while at the same time arresting Sunni Muslims at an alarming rate.

There are some indications that Juhayman may have possessed a strong level of takfirms (claiming that one is an apostate) during the years leading up to the siege of Mecca. One account claims that Juhayman declared that the Saudi Kingdom had accepted “Shiites as Muslims, and fights those who disagree with this, and opposes those who combat the heretical worshippers of Ali and Hussain.” For Juhayman, the Saudi Kingdom had fallen so far away from what he saw as the “true” version of Islam that they were now accepting Shi’a Muslims as legitimate believers. This becomes quite problematic for radical understandings of takfirms, and may have been another leading cause to Juhayman’s apocalyptic belief. The alliance, according to Juhayman, between infidels, Christians, Shi’a Muslims, and the Saudi Kingdom represented a polluted version of Islamic rule and a sign that the Final Hour had finally started.

Juhayman was deeply interested in the classical sources for guidance on what was

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143 Ibid., 50.
144 Ibid., 31.
145 Ibid., 32.
about to occur in Mecca, and believed that the Mahdi was the first step in ushering in a Day of Judgement that would result in attacks against his rebellion from all directions. Possibly citing the A’maq Cycle (the focus of this thesis), Juhayman alleged that during this conflict a third of Muslims would be martyred, a third who would abandon the cause, and a third that would destroy the Byzantine (Christian) cities with the cries of “Allahu Akbar.”146 This conflict at Mecca would then result with the return of Jesus, after which according to Juhayman, “Not a single infidel will survive the breath of [his] air.”147

Much like the Sudanese Mahdi of the late 19th century, Juhayman may have attempted to use apocalyptic conviction to energize Muslims universally to rise up against immorality and Western influence on Islamic society. He, like the Sudanese Mahdi decades prior, claimed that the appearance of the Mahdi was confirmed to him in a dream by the Prophet Muhammad and there are accounts that his followers also began receiving these dreams in the days leading up to the attack on Mecca.148 Yet even with as calculated of a plan as the one that Juhayman developed, and the knowledge he gained from Dawud’s hadiths, one major detail was overlooked by Juhayman— the demand to take control of the Ka’ba armed with guns. One account claims that Juhayman told his followers, concerning his call to fight at the Ka’ba, “If we do not bring weapons this [enemy] army will not come to Mecca and so it will not be swallowed into the Earth. We will not shoot until they shoot first.”149

Working from the classical sources, Juhayman believed that the battle must take place at the Ka’ba and his rebellion should be armed. Consequently, however, the act of

146 Ibid., 47.
147 Ibid., 47.
148 Filiu and DeBevoise, Apocalypse in Islam, 76.
149 Trofimov, The Siege of Mecca, 52.
forcefully taking the holiest structure in Islam stifled any potential widespread support for the millenarian rebellion. The seemingly sacrilegious move came across to many as something that would not be done by the “true” Mahdi. Jean-Pierre Filiu notes, “Plainly the insurgents desired the overthrow of the ruling dynasty, as well as the punishment of all those ‘Ulama who, in their view, had corrupted Islam by serving the interests of the Sa’uds….But to the rebels’ immense dismay and incomprehension, no movement of solidarity emerged outside Mecca, for the simple reason that the sacrilege they had committed seemed unpardonable.”¹⁵⁰ While the rebels had looked to the classical sources for indication that the beginning of the fifteenth century would mark the time where Islamic law would once again rule the world, the armed aggression on the Ka’ba had angered the Saudi population to a level that would not bring any support outside the walls of the structure.

The failure to attain a high level of support across the Kingdom did not necessarily imply no one supported the movement, but the lack of unified support certainly damaged the believability of the message. In a time prior to the Internet, the only way of spreading the message would have been word of mouth—resulting in even less support to the cause. There may have been some people in Mecca speculating the “what if he is right” question during this attack. This may have even led to a substantial part of the Saudi population being hesitant to criticize Juhayman’s message on the off chance that his brother-in-law was in fact the long awaited Mahdi, but such speculation did not result in any significant number of additional people joining the rebellion. Yet in the wake of what had just occurred in Iran, and decades of Western influence in the Middle East, the plausibility of the message may have been amplified as hours turned to days with the Ka’ba remaining

¹⁵⁰ Filiu and DeBevoise, *Apocalypse in Islam*, 76.
under Juhayman’s control.

The ability to control the Ka’ba for so long, however, was in a result of the Saudi Kingdom’s shared fear of conducting violence near the Ka’ba that had been a topic of debate amongst Juhayman’s supporters. It would take roughly three days for the head of the High Council of ‘Ulama to issue a fatwa permitting the use of force in removing hostiles from the Ka’ba.\(^\text{151}\) By referencing Surah 2:191—“Do not fight with them at the Sacred Mosque until they fight with you in it, but if they do fight you, then slay them; such is the recompense of the unbelievers”—a decision was eventually made to first demand surrender from the rebels, otherwise “all measures could be taken to arrest them, even if it led to a fight and the killing of those who were not arrested and had not surrendered.”\(^\text{152}\)

This justification for violence against the group in the Ka’ba, however, did not end the insurgency as swiftly as Saudi officials had anticipated. The motivation of the rebels was the belief that the proclaimed Mahdi, Muhammad Abdullah, could not die. This messianic belief was only amplified as time progressed, especially after the firefights began to commence between the government and the rebels. It is reported, whether true or the narration of the rebels, that Muhammad Abdullah was continuously at the front of the line of fighters while never ever taking a serious wound—legitimizing in the minds of his followers that he was in fact the awaited Mahdi.\(^\text{153}\) This luck eventually ran out and the proclaimed Mahdi was killed after trying to throw back a grenade—a skill that he had supposedly accomplished throughout the skirmishes.\(^\text{154}\) Much like what had occurred in

\(^{151}\) Ibid., 77.
\(^{152}\) Trofimov, The Siege of Mecca, 151.
\(^{153}\) Ibid., 154.
\(^{154}\) Ibid., 160.
Sudan, the death of this Meccan Mahdi resulted in a loss of energy and fervor amongst his followers.

The sudden death of the one supposed to be the Mahdi ultimately implied that the mission was not actually under the ordinance of the eschatological narrative that Juhayman had claimed was given to him from the Prophet Muhammad in a dream. Most rebels, following the death of Muhammad Abdullah, withdrew from the structure by way of surrender or were quickly killed. Juhayman, however, refused to leave the area and with a small number of followers barricaded deep underneath the Ka’ba until December 3, 1979.155 The rebellion, while drawn out longer than expected, was drawing to an end even with the final group of armed rebels remaining hidden in the structure. A sudden change in plan in defeating the rebels, however, would end up resulting in much longer consequences for the Kingdom and sent ripple effects across the Middle East.

To reach Juhayman and his barricaded rebels, Saudi officials looked for outside help. Through the help of the French, the task of placing “incapacitating gas” into the areas that held the remaining rebels was undertaken “from the Groupe d’Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale, sent at the request of Prince Turki and [who] formally converted to Islam before going into action.”156 Now with the expertise of the French commanders using Western weapons and bearing French gas masks, Saudi soldiers were able to gas the rebels long enough to enter into the barricaded controlled areas where they found and captured Juhayman amongst the dead and wounded.157 The use of Western allies and weaponry looked bad on the part of Saudi officials in the minds of some Muslims from the fact that Mecca was supposed to be off-limits for all non-Muslims—especially inside

155 Ibid., 209.
156 Filiu and DeBevoise, Apocalypse in Islam, 77.
157 Trofimov, The Siege of Mecca, 210-212.
the Ka’ba. Such a choice of action would lead to a level of distrust towards the Saudi Kingdom and its alliances with the West among jihadists across the world, including Osama Bin Laden.

In the aftermath of the siege, Saudi officials reported that over one hundred Saudi soldiers were killed with nearly five hundred wounded, while the rebels had suffered just over one hundred deaths, among the dead rebels were a variety of nationalities including Saudi, Pakistani, Indonesian, India, Egyptian, Burmese, Indonesian, Afghani, and even an American man named Jamal Ameer Kahel Abdullah.\(^{158}\) It would seem that the appeal of Juhayman’s messianic speculation was not specific to just Saudi Arabians, but was a shared vision across the world. Those who survived the initial battle, including Juhayman, were later executed and publically beheaded on January 8, 1980.\(^{159}\) It appeared that after the death of the remaining rebels, apocalyptic speculation came to a screeching halt, yet in reality it may have opened the doors for more levels of violence.

The use of Western forces and weaponry in the battle achieved two unintended outcomes; first it may have supported the rebels’ belief that they were fighting the final battles of Malhamah and led to great fervor among them until the death of the man claiming to be the Mahdi. The introduction of Western “Christian” forces and weapons would have played right into the narrative that Juhayman had constructed. Secondly, the introduction of Western weapons, and whispers that French forces actually fought inside of Mecca, sent ripple effects across the Middle East for years to come—most especially in the case of Osama Bin Laden. Most of the weaponry used by the Saudi army and National Guard during the attack was American made—including the TOWs used to kill

\(^{158}\) Ibid., 224.
\(^{159}\) Ibid., 239.
the rebel snipers posted up in the balconies of the structure—with the French providing the gas weapons and equipment to flush out the last of the rebels.\textsuperscript{160}

Another interesting point is that the man behind the construction of the structure surrounding the Ka’ba was Salim Bin Laden, the brother of Osama Bin Laden, and provided the blueprints of the structure to the Saudi army in order to attack the rebels.\textsuperscript{161} During the siege on Mecca there is indication to show that while Osama Bin Laden did not necessarily believe that the Mahdi had appeared at the Ka’ba in 1979, he also would never publically condemn the actions of the rebels. The only known account of Bin Laden speaking on the events comes from an audio recording in 2004 which has Bin Laden declaring, “Prince Fahd defiled the Sanctity of the Grand Mosque. He showed stubbornness, acted against the advice of everybody, and sent tracked and armored vehicles into the mosque. I still recall the imprint of tracked vehicles on the tiles of the mosque. People still recall the minarets were covered with black smoke due to their shelling by tanks.”\textsuperscript{162} Bin Laden certainly would later share many of the same critiques against the Saudi regime that Juhayman had possessed, although he would never avert to messianic speculations in his own argument against the regime. It would seem that the attack on Mecca, and the actions conducted by the Saudi Kingdom, would be a major influence on Bin Laden in later years of his life.

Perhaps the most noteworthy result from the attack on Mecca, however, was from a man known as Abu Mohammad al Maqdisi who had become increasingly interested with the ideology that Juhayman had introduced into the world. His own brother-in-law had even been a supporter of Juhayman during the time of the rebellion and siege on

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 153.
\textsuperscript{161} Filiu and DeBevoise, \textit{Apocalypse in Islam}, 77.
\textsuperscript{162} Trofimov, \textit{The Siege of Mecca}, 247.
Mecca. In his writing, Maqdisi demanded that it was the Saudi government that had acted wrongfully during the entire event, even though the declaration of Muhammad Abdullah being the Mahdi was proven incorrect. He continues in *The Clear Proofs That the Saudi State Is Infidel* that the actions of Juhayman were “nothing compared with the enormous crimes of the Saudi government: blocking people from the path of God, embracing disbelief, harming worshippers…and opening the doors of the country wide open to infidels of various faiths.”

For Maqdisi, the Saudi Kingdom had shown its “true” colors during the rebellion by attacking the Ka’ba and allowing non-Islamic fighters to enter into the Kingdom to assist in the matter. Maqdisi, however, is better known for who he would later share a cell with in Jordan during the early 1990’s. It was in this jail cell that Maqdisi would spend significant time with a man known as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who later in 2005 would send a suicide bomber to attack a building in Baghdad under the alias of Abu Juhayman.

The Modern Transformation of Apocalyptic Literature

The events of 1979, including the peace treaty signed between Egypt and Israel, would become leading causes of the civil unrest occurring across the Middle East. This unrest may have been fueled even further by the increase in skepticism of the growing influence of the Western world on Islamic nations during the late 20th century. The Iranian revolution and Meccan Siege highlighted the civilian distrust of government officials and Western society, which had begun to be embraced by Saudi Arabia and Iran prior to

163 Ibid., 249.
164 Ibid., 249.
165 Ibid., 250.
1979. For example, after the Siege of Mecca had been resolved, newer concerns on the relaxing restrictions on Saudi women’s dress, the employment of women, and the use of alcohol—all critiques made by Juhayman previously—became targets of reform by the Saudi government in an appeal to avoid another rebellion.\(^{166}\) Iran similarly attempted to combat the educational, societal, and religious changes that had developed under the leadership of Reza Shah prior to the revolution.\(^{167}\) Other concerns that began to be tackled following the Revolution in Iran were “Satanic temptations such as music, painting, and motion pictures and the threat of unveiled women and their intrusion into male spaces.”\(^{168}\)

Directly following both the Siege of Mecca and the Iranian Revolution another major event occurred, this time in the nation of Afghanistan. It was in December 1979 that a revival of global jihad sprouted and was directly linked to the invading Soviet forces into the eschatological region known as “Khorasan” where the black banners of the Mahdi were thought to appear in many classical sources. While failing to usher in a revival of apocalyptic speculation like the two uprisings in Mecca and Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan brought with it a revitalization of jihad of the sword and provided the initial space for groups like Al-Qaeda to develop. While the Soviet invasion, Iranian Revolution, and Siege of Mecca may have had no direct influence on each other, they all strangely enough took place at the beginning of the fifteenth century of the Islamic calendar—a moment where eschatological narratives point to as an important date.

The sudden revival of revolution and global jihad, in wake of the beginning of the 15\(^{th}\) century, fueled more anxiety toward Western influence on Islamic cultures. Such anxiety

\(^{166}\) Ibid., 241-242.
\(^{168}\) Ibid., 218.
would spiral more out of control over the course of the next three decades, where it began developing an innovative and radical form of apocalyptic literature. Cook finds that it was also during this period of time that a variety of resemblances began to become apparent between the new assortment of apocalyptic writings and the revitalization of global jihad. One such theme was that both were viewing Muslim society as being corrupted by the West and in need of reverting back to the example of the Prophet Muhammad through the implementation of Shari’ah Law.

According to Cook, this fresh wave of jihadists and apocalyptic writers wanted to “reform society radically” in order to “achieve a just state” where they could practice their faith without disturbance from outside forces.169 Whereas Cook finds there may be a slight difference between how this just state should be brought about, both may have been regarding Dawud’s classic hadith of “A group of my [Muhammad’s] community will continue fighting for the truth, victorious over those who oppose them, until the last of them fights the Dajjal” as sources of inspiration and guidance in wake of what was occurring across the Islamic world.170

Cook continues that it may have been a shared “sense of persecution and the idea that the entire world is conspiring to destroy Islam” that allowed for both jihadists and modern authors to imagine that the Final Hour was rapidly approaching and that Muslims must act in wake of such revelation. Similarly, it was only after 1979 that both jihadists and apocalyptic authors began focusing their attention on the progressive influence Israel and the United States of America had on the society and morality of Islamic nations.

With this skepticism of both nations came a sudden development and expansion of what

170 Cook, "Fighting to Create the Just State: Apocalypticism in Radical Muslim Discourse," 368.
many would call “conspiracy theories” on bookshelves across the Middle East—due in large part to the popularity of Said Ayyub’s *The Anti-Christ*. His 1986 work would initiate a new genre of apocalyptic literature focused on identifying the Dajjal’s plot to control the world. With his book displaying on its cover a one-eyed soldier with both Soviet and American symbols patched onto his military uniform while adorning a Star of David necklace, Ayyub would thrive on the actions around him and the anxieties amongst Muslims to become a leading authority on the Final Hour in modernity.\(^{171}\)

Leading Authors of the 1990’s

According to Ayyub’s cover, the Dajjal (Antichrist) was not merely a representation of America and Russia, but was also a reference to both being in company with the Jewish tradition, all of which were attempting to terminate the Islamic tradition. More importantly to Ayyub’s theory, this was already occurring in real time and could now be discovered by Muslims across the world. He writes,

> The Jews have placed themselves in the hands of the Antichrist. They have considered him as one of their princes, they have forged a strategy for [carrying out] his purposes, and they have held to it. They have used all the means at their disposal to realize this supreme goal. They have infiltrated political and diplomatic activity in many places in the world, and they have penetrated societies through channels of communication that they control. And all for the Antichrist! This Antichrist lives in our midst today, in our world! He knows the frontiers reached and occupied by Israel, and it is from this place [Israel], where he lives, that he will venture forth.\(^ {172}\)

To support this claim, Ayyub references Paul’s conversion to Christianity as part of the agenda led by the Antichrist, “Paul founded in Jesus’s name a religion that Jesus would not have understood when he was alive…and that he will not understand when he

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\(^{171}\) Filiu and DeBevoise, *Apocalypse in Islam*, 120-121 Figure 1

\(^{172}\) Ibid., 84.
returns at the end times.”\textsuperscript{173} This, according to Ayyub, helps explain why classical eschatological narratives claim that “The son of Mary will descend from heaven and will be a just leader. He will destroy the cross and kill the swine. Peace will everywhere reign and swords will be used as sickles.”\textsuperscript{174} While he uses classical sources, such as this hadith, he also provides his own interpretation of historical events to fit alongside his theory of a Jewish Dajjal.\textsuperscript{175}

Ayyub continues in this line of thought to claim that Jews were secretly behind every atrocity that had occurred throughout Islamic history—including the crusades in the Middle Ages, the creation of “Freemasonry” used to control America, and Napoleon Bonaparte’s conquest of Muslim lands.\textsuperscript{176} For Ayyub, Jews are not only followers of the Dajjal but are also conspirators attacking the Islamic tradition throughout time in a variety of different ways, including politics and economics. Jumping ahead to his own time, Ayyub notes the events occurring around him were again the arrangements and deeds of the Antichrist—now being supported by a Judeo-Christian Alliance rather than just the Jews. Ayyub uses this line of thinking to assert that the Cold War was actually synthetic and only being depicted as a power struggle between the two nations. As his cover implies, all three forces were actually working for the Dajjal in order to destabilize the Middle East, now through an “Israeli-American strategic cooperation.”\textsuperscript{177}

Ayyub also emphasized to his readers that the Final Hour and appearance of the Antichrist is going to be in tandem with high levels of unbelief and immorality within Muslim societies. He claims that to destabilize the Middle East fully, there must be a high

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{174} Cook, \textit{Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic}, page ?
\textsuperscript{175} Cook identifies one of the cycles under Metahistorical Apocalypses as \textit{The Jewish Dajjal}.
\textsuperscript{176} Filiu and DeBevoise, \textit{Apocalypse in Islam}, 85.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 86.
level of disunity among Muslims. At one point he writes, “The Antichrist is the goal of all of the camps of unbelief that have allowed the realm of thought to cease, and did not listen or pay attention to the set-path God has placed as a fortification for all who believe…God foretold that they would cause corruption in the world and that they would make haste in that corruption with any intelligence and any ability, and they would go with that corruption into the future.”

Ayyub claims that the only way to overcome such an increasing influence of the Antichrist is for Muslims to revert back to living as closely to the example of Muhammad and the early Muslim community as possible. It is only by doing this that they will be able to position themselves as pious believers in a world of corruption and disbelief. He writes, “What is the part of the believer in the victory that will be gained in the final end? The part of the believer is that he takes his place in the camp of faith and that he places himself in the path defined by well-trodden [the Shari’a], and that he lives his life in accordance with that definition.”

This separation of two camps, however, was not the end goal of Ayyub’s vision. Instead he also claims that there must be a decisive battle between the camp of faith and the camp of the Antichrist. This battle, foretold in some classic sources, has now undertaken the form of a major war that will include every person, since “The Jews are planning the Third World War in order to eliminate the Islamic world and all opposition to Israel.” Such a vision of the final battle between the Jewish tradition and the Islamic tradition highlights two major themes of Ayyub’s work that would later be adopted by future apocalyptic authors—deliberate anti-Semitic rhetoric and a fear that Jews and

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178 Cook, Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature, 189.
179 Ibid., 226.
180 Filiu and DeBevoise, Apocalypse in Islam, 87.
Christians were conspiring against Muslims under the guidance of the Antichrist.

Yet Ayyub’s narrative, while periodically citing classic apocalyptic sources, does not follow in the footsteps of previous authors or even the narrative of Juhayman who based his belief solely on the classic sources. Rather Ayyub attempts to construct his narrative with a slew of non-traditional sources in order to make loose connections between the classic narratives and what was occurring around him. In fact, Ayyub is not sneaky with this strategy or attempting to hide it but rather completely refuses to acknowledge his faults. What separates Ayyub’s authorship from these previous movements and writings goes beyond just a desire to blame the Jewish people for current political and social problems in Muslim nations. According to Filiu, “Ayyub ruptured the organic link between the Islamic tradition and the last days of the world. In doing this he invented a new genre, apocalyptic fiction, whose purpose was both educational and propagandistic, and whose influence was destined rapidly to spread throughout the lands of Islam.”

Ayyub’s revolutionary work removed itself from the limitations and confinements of the hadith literatures and Kitab al-Fitna. Instead, he uses the sources when they work with his narrative and then looks elsewhere for support for any of his claims that do not line up with the classic sources. For example, Ayyub openly quotes Western Holocaust deniers in order to inflate his conspiracy that the Antichrist is manipulating every historical event in order to set up the events of the Final Hour. Early critics of Ayyub note that he almost entirely cites Western sources, Jewish texts, and the Christian apocryphal books of the New Testament for his construction of the apocalypse. Rather than work exclusively from the authoritative literatures from the Islamic tradition, as the classical authors did, Ayyub openly uses non-traditional sources as evidence for his newly

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181 Ibid., 88.
constructed narrative. Another example of such is where Ayyub mentions that “the faithful one” mentioned in the *Book of Revelation* actually was a direct reference to the Prophet Muhammad and thus *Revelation* can be used as an authority on the end times.\(^{182}\)

While often working from outside the tradition, Ayyub does periodically interweave classic Islamic sources into his arguments. Using the hadith collection of Abu Dawud, as Juhayman had done, Ayyub decides to use the classic sources to connect geographical locations with what was going on during the time of his writing. Activities occurring in Iraq and Afghanistan (Khorasan), areas of importance in classic sources, thus can suddenly be discussed as actually occurring in real time and as evidence that his narrative is correct. Yet as Filiu points out, this tactic of picking and choosing which parts of the classic sources ultimately created inconsistencies between Ayyub’s narrative and what was found in the Dawud’s classic account—specifically on where the Dajjal is to arise from.\(^{183}\)

Ayyub’s popularity, however, only was amplified as his work became more widespread and distributed across the Middle East despite his lack of citation and use of non-traditional sources. The formal and scholarly critiques attacking his work held no weight in the larger population reading his novel that most likely held no strong understanding of the classic sources. The popularity and income brought about with Ayyub’s novel laid the foundation for how future writers and book companies would go about writing and selling apocalyptic literature. The rise in popularity was further sustained with every military conflict, political action, and social disturbance occurring in the Middle East—especially with what would occur in final years leading up to the 21st

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A pupil of Ayyub’s work, Muhammad Izat Arif, would soon after *The Antichrist* begin his own set of fictional narratives under guidance of the book publisher *Dar al-I’tisam* (The House of Refuge). By avoiding concentrating *specifically* on anti-Jewish rhetoric and a Jewish Dajjal, Arif was able to expanded his narrative to begin including actions occurring in other Middle Eastern nations. Arif depicts Saddam Hussein as an Israeli/American agent, while, like his predecessor, remarking that the Antichrist is surely “the spiritual father of the Jews.”\(^{184}\) He, however, continues on to include Muslim leaders in this conspiracy, “There can be no doubt that the Jews are behind the rejection of the Shari’a of God and the preference of relativistic laws, because it [the Shari’a] is more just, more compassionate, and more right. This is what proves the deviation of the ruling politicians, who rule according to something that God has not revealed and disgrace their identities through the fact that they are named by Muslim names.”\(^{185}\)

Arif begins to not only place the Jewish tradition within the Dajjal’s grand scheme against the Islamic tradition, but also includes illegitimate Muslim rulers who purposely moved entire nations away from abiding by Shari’a Law. Structuring an argument for why the world should be run by Shari’a Law and not the laws of man, Arif contends that America and Israel were secretly trying to destabilize and remove believers from their tradition by way of puppet regimes in the Middle East dating as far back as the beginning of colonialization. He contends,

Secular groups go along with a plan built upon the slogans of freedom and democracy. When they reach their goals, these slogans themselves will have accomplished the desire of the sons of Zion by propagation of chaos and societal aimlessness and destructive agitation for the people. This is what we are feeling

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\(^{184}\) Ibid., 93.

\(^{185}\) Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*, 34.
during the present, which is based upon something other than fearing god. The pillars of the Jewish rule are built upon the axis of propagation of corruption… and the rule of the people through relativistic laws that increase the tyranny and leads to conflict between people.\textsuperscript{186}

For Arif, the concepts of “freedom,” “secularism,” and “democracy” were all formed as a part of this wider agenda against Islamic societies led by the Dajjal. Both Ayyub and Arif do, at times, make references to the classical narratives but easily diverge from their contexts and rhetoric. By doing this both authors are no longer restricted to the confines of a classical source’s narrative and are now able to create any narrative that they want. With no limitations, these authors were able to publish their novels with either messy or no citations, and were able to transform any hadith or Qur’anic verse to fit directly into their newly constructed narrative. The ability to draw any number of connections eventually reached the point of adopting evidence of UFOs and the Bermuda Triangle to legitimize their narratives. This was brought to life and popularized through the writings of Muhammad Isa Dawud.

Dawud’s first two public releases, \textit{Beware: The Antichrist Has Invaded the World from the Bermuda Triangle} and \textit{The Hidden Links between the Antichrist, the Secrets of the Bermuda Triangle, and Flying Saucers} plots became the leading texts for introducing the realm of UFOs and the Bermuda Triangle into the narration of the Dajjal. Muhammad Isa Dawud uses similar ideas to construct a historical timeline of the Dajjal’s life. Dawud does this by referencing and re-constructing Sahih Muslim’s collection on the narration of Tamin al-Dari. Within this account al-Dari is alleged to have sailed to the “West” due to a major storm on the sea where he eventually came across the Dajjal on an unknown island. Muhammad Isa Dawud asserts that the reason the Dajjal was on this island was

\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 34.
because he had unsuccessfully attempted to take control of the world before sailing to North America to wait for the proper time—explaining why al-Dari would have come across him.\textsuperscript{187}

Through this line of reinterpreting the classic hadith, Dawud claims that since “The Bermuda Triangle is the point of departure and return for the flying saucers” that the Dajjal must be waiting there to once again take control of the earth.\textsuperscript{188} This would explain the narrative of al-Dari while also explaining the widespread mystery of UFOs and the Bermuda Triangle. To explain what these UFOs must be, Dawud explains that their sightings are either a trick of the mind or evidence that the Dajjal possesses technology unknown to the rest of the world that will soon be used against Muslims. One excerpt from his writing highlights this reasoning,

\begin{quote}
Yes the Antichrist has subordinated light and understood the secrets of vision and arrived at the secrets of magnetic gravity…Yes, the Antichrist rides particles of light, since this idea did not come first to Einstein, the Jewish thief, who stole ideas, theories, and truths…Yes, the Antichrist is able to make a new type of artificial light and is able to take advantage of the sea of particle rays falling on the earth like a waterfall.\textsuperscript{189}
\end{quote}

Not only is he quick to argue that UFOs must be the work of the Dajjal, but also points out that Einstein was part of the wider Jewish conspiracy against Muslims. This notion of a world-wide conspiracy was not only specifically done to scare readers into believing the Final Hour was at hand, but rather may have been a tactic to bring unity to the Islamic world under a shared threat. According to Cook, “most of these authors subscribe[d] to the idea of an international conspiracy against Islam and Muslims everywhere…to unite

\textsuperscript{187} Filiu and DeBevoise, \textit{Apocalypse in Islam}, 94.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 94.
\textsuperscript{189} Cook, \textit{Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature}, 79.
all Muslims into one state ruled by a caliph.”\textsuperscript{190} Whether the latter part was always the case remains unknown, but the appeal of a worldwide conspiracy against \textit{all} Muslims may have been used to ignite belief that the end was nearing. According to these writings it was not just Muslims living in a specific region that were going to be impacted by the Dajjal, but rather Muslims living in every corner of the world were going to suffer at the hands of Jews, infidels, Christians, and the Dajjal. By appealing to every Muslim, authors were ultimately able to reach a wider audience of readers. Such a tool may have been the goal of the book companies publishing these works in order to create more sales and interest in the subject.

While distrust of the Jewish tradition became incorporated into these early modern narrations of the Dajjal, it is important to highlight that there remains little classical evidence to support such a claim. Besides the hadith known as the \textit{tradition of the rocks and the trees}\textsuperscript{—}“The Hour will not arrive until the Muslims fight the Jews, and the Muslims will slaughter them, until the Jew will hide behind the rocks and the tress. The rocks and the trees will say: ‘O Muslim, O servant of God, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him!’”\textsuperscript{—}there is no little conclusive evidence for the Jews and Muslims being enemies during the Final Hour.\textsuperscript{191} Yet, the opinion that Jews would be followers of the Dajjal is littered throughout the hundreds of books being produced in the 1990’s. The Jewish tradition was simply where all guesses were going on who would be joining the Dajjal, most likely a result of the formation of Israel and the fighting between it and Muslim nations in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. It would not be until the morning of September 11, 2001, that a new enemy would arise. Following the attacks, the attention of jihadists and

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., 17.

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 35-36.
modern apocalyptic authors alike turned towards the United States of America as being the newest pawn in the Dajjal’s wider scheme.

Post 9-11: Radical Transformations in Literature

The attacks on the morning of September 11th changed the landscape for how modern Islamic literatures would be written. Muhammad Isa Dawud remained a popular author at this time and was one of the first to latch onto the attacks on the World Trade Center as new evidence that the end of the world was nearing. His release of *The Surprise* in 2001 came with a cover bearing the images of the two towers burning alongside a picture of the Dome of the Rock directly below it. For Dawud, these attacks were set up by Jewish leaders in hopes of further destabilizing the Middle East to destroy the Islamic tradition’s image in the public consciousness of Americans. This attack on American soil, according to Dawud, would lead to further and “justified” American transgression into the Middle East. *The Surprise* would go on to find its greatest success in Egypt during the first two weeks of publication before being republished two more times.192

While Dawud became the first apocalyptic author to venture into the realm of conspiracy with the 9/11 attacks, it was the authors that followed him that fully developed his works and transformed them into another genre of modern apocalyptic literature. Amin Muhammad Gamaleddin, who had been previously hired in 1997 by the publishing company Al-Tawfiqiyya (The Mediator), was able to find more widespread success following the events of 9/11. This was largely due to his ability to draw connections between the events of the 21st century and a previous book on the signs of the Hour that he wrote. Gamaleddin’s 1997 *The Revelation of the Minor Signs of the*

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*Hour* proposed that all 79 signs prior to the Hour had already occurred and the Muslim world should now wait until the final battles and appearance of the Dajjal occur. With the attacks of 9/11 Gamaleddin saw an opportunity to provide fresh insight into his previous narrative—this time on the actions of the United States.\(^{193}\)

According to Gamaleddin’s 2001 release *Armageddon*, the attacks on the World Trade Center were a part of a strategy to initiate World War III, which would commence with American invasions throughout predominately Muslim nations. These coming invasions would “haunt Syria [Sham], darken Egypt, assail Iraq, and engulf the Arabian Peninsula” to a level that had not previously been seen in history.\(^{194}\) According to Gamaleddin’s prediction this will be accomplished by a “new coalition, organized by America in response to the destruction visited upon New York and Washington…in the name of tracking down the terrorists and eliminating terrorism.”\(^{195}\) Since all of the signs had previously been completed, these invasions would be the final plots of the Dajjal and battles of the end times. The attacks of 9/11 simply allowed modern authors, such as Gamaleddin, an ability to edit and reconstruct how the Final Hour would take place. Whereas the 1990’s had previously been more of guessing games from apocalyptic authors on who would initiate the final battles, the 21\(^{st}\) century was able to direct its agenda against the United States and on the real time actions it was conducting across the Middle East.

Moving away from exclusively discussing anti-Semitic topics that had characterized the writings of the 1990’s, apocalyptic writings during the start of the 21\(^{st}\) century now focused directly on the actions of America in the Middle East. Gamaleddin and

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193 Ibid., 97.
194 Ibid., 111.
195 Ibid., 111.
Muhammad Isa Dawud suddenly became leading authorities for this new offshoot of contemporary apocalyptic writings, and more book companies were quick to join in the hysteria and speculation. One Jordanian company, for example, published *The Antichrist and the Battle of Armageddon* by Hisham Muhammad Abu Hakima after seeing the success that Dawud and Gamaleddin found in their writings.

Hakima, working from the narratives constructed by Ayyub a decade prior, claimed the world was being divided into “the camp of faith and the camp of godlessness” and that “the Islamic forces, believing in Allah and him alone, will be found in Syria [Sham] and in the Arabian Peninsula.” Hakima argued that the actions of the West were purposely attempting to place each person into one of these camps and that the most pious believers would be found in Syria and the Arabian Peninsula—an allusion perhaps to the notion that Jesus would descend upon Damascus to help defeat the Dajjal.

Most of the classical sources pointed to Iraq or Syria (two major places of interest in the classical sources) as areas where the end of the world would occur. The ability for modern authors to reference classical hadiths in the wake of what was happening in the present time ultimately allowed them the capability to sporadically show some level of legitimacy and authority amongst its readers. For example, Dawud’s second book, released in 2002, titled *The Treasure of the Euphrates* stated “Such is the secret, O nation of Islam: after having detected the Euphrates’ mountain of gold, America decided to invade Iraq and to change its regime.” Such a claim could be supported when read beside Muslims’ hadith “The Last Hour would not come before the Euphrates uncovers a mountain of gold, for which people would fight. Ninety-nine out of each one hundred

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196 Ibid., 113.
197 Ibid., 118.
would die but every man amongst them would say that perhaps he would be the one who
would be saved (and thus possess this gold).”

Such a tactic, while not particularly popular amongst these modern authors, did
provide readers with classical narratives that could be viewed as actually occurring
around them. It would be hard to deny how influential oil has become in the world, and
how it has been linked to American’s interests within the Middle East. By responding to
the widespread feelings of skepticism and anxieties toward the actions of America
through references to classic sources, modern authors were able to amplify their claims
tenfold. The beginning of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century ushered in a new wave of writing on Islamic
eschatology throughout the Middle East and became increasingly popular as the Middle
East remained in states of war and conflict.

Consequently it would seem that the actions of America only provided more space for
the radical narratives to find room on bookshelves in the Middle East. Whereas the
1990’s enjoyed a vast amount of speculation on what was to come, the 21\textsuperscript{st} century
answered those speculations and gave authors the opportunity to frequently draw links
between the Final Hour and what was happening in real time with regard to what the
United States was doing. It would not be until two years later with the start of Operation
Iraqi Freedom that these connections were blown right off with a range of new
speculations flooding the market. Filiu writes,

> The extension to Iraq of what the American government called the global war
against terror proved to be an extraordinary source of encouragement to
apocalyptic speculation in the Islamic world in the years that followed…The new
apocalyptic literature, by harnessing the rhetoric and the images of both Muslim
and Christian tradition, was able to distort and redirect scared prophecy for its
own purposes, and, with the invasion of Iraq, to reach a new and larger audience

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198 Sahih Muslim Book 54:38
while at the same time strengthening the plausibility of its forecasts.\textsuperscript{199}

Filiu notes that “what had developed fifteen years earlier as an anti-Semitic species of fiction now became an obsessive style of paranoid interpretation…for making sense of the world.”\textsuperscript{200} The predictions of previous authors, whether legitimate or not, were coming to fruition in the minds of those who had read their works. The invasion of Iraq and toppling the Saddam Hussein’s government would bear the weight of skepticism among these authors, who once again had new material to work around. One major publishing company from Cairo, \textit{Dar al-Kitab al Arabi} (The House of the Arab Book), was quick to see the opportunity of this event and began releasing apocalyptic literatures in 2003.\textsuperscript{201} Contemporary apocalyptic literatures were no longer the taboo writings of the 1990’s, but were increasingly becoming authorities on the events of the Final Hour.

With the sudden increase in popularity and authority came also a desire from authors to address every single issue occurring in the world. This became quite problematic, however, and led to the wide range of conspiracies that had existed in the 1990’s to become popularized once more. An Egyptian lawyer named Mansu Abdelhalkim became one of these leading voices in the wake of the American invasion of Iraq and felt as though he had to explain every event with an apocalyptic framework. For Abdelhalkim, the end of the world had not only been unfolding but now could “no longer be stopped.”\textsuperscript{202} This, he claims, was due specifically to the presidencies of both George Bushes, Freemasonry and the Rothschild family, drugs and immorality afflicting Muslim

\textsuperscript{199} Filiu and DeBevoise, \textit{Apocalypse in Islam}, 119-120.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 123.
societies, and the use of UFO technologies to achieve world dominance.\textsuperscript{203} Here, we find a resurgence of discussion on UFOs and wide-scale conspiracies. Abdelhalkim, drawing from Christian sources and Western skeptics of 9/11, goes as far as even accepting the prophecies of Nostradamus as a source of authority for interpreting current events.\textsuperscript{204} Abdelhalkim uses these non-traditional sources in order to even eradicate all responsibility of the attacks on 9/11 from Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda.

He instead insists, possibly from Thierry Meyssan’s \textit{9/11 The Big Lie}, that Bin Laden, Al-Qaeda, and Muslims in general were set up by “a group of the American state apparatus charged with implementing the policy of President Bush.”\textsuperscript{205} According to Abdelhalkim, this grand conspiracy was the doing of the Dajjal, and only conducted by the American government to destabilize the Middle East for justification for invading Iraq and Afghanistan. While he uses a vast amount of non-traditional sources, much as all of the modern authors have done, Abdelhalkim attempted to place every political and military action done by the United States into an apocalyptic narrative. This desire led him to dive into the same speculations and conspiracies that previous authors had been focused on. This, however, did not mean that the genre of apocalyptic literature lost any of its traction.

The invasion of Iraq in 2003, alongside President Bush’s infamous public “great Crusade” reference fueled more anxiety and skepticism toward what America was attempting to accomplish. It would appear that the literatures were able to get away with discussions of UFOs and Freemasons because the actions of the United States often fell in line with what the novels were claiming. In much the same way that the \textit{Left Behind}
Christian apocalyptic series dominated the book shelves of American bookstores in the early 21st century, Islamic apocalyptic literature was thriving from the worldwide interest on identifying and discussing the apocalypse. Contemporary Islamic literature, still basing their narratives on the classical sources, tended to view the end of the world being filled with corruption, oppression, and in need of some sort of violent revolution and battle against the Dajjal rather than a coming rapture that would remove the pious believers from the Earth. The literature, focused on the violence that will take place towards the Final Hour, referenced many of the same actions conducted by the United States as jihadists were.

This new genre of literature and apocalyptic propaganda that was being released at a rapid rate developed and popularized at nearly the same time that jihadism became a global pursuit among a small minority of Muslims. The timing may have been completely coincidental, or perhaps the literatures were building their narratives on the actions of jihadists, but the combination of the two did instigate a new wave of anxiety and fear across the Middle East—especially in Iraq during the first years of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The lasting impacts that the literature had on jihadists and vice versa may never be known, but knowing that both were occurring and circulating within the Middle East at the same time helps support a theory that both may have been influencing disenfranchised Muslims who were seeing firsthand the repercussions of war and violence.
Paving the Way for ISIS

Not every jihadist was influenced by apocalyptic narratives, and not all modern authors were influenced by the actions of jihadists, although both certainly benefitted from the actions of the others. In the mix of a global spotlight on Bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda and the transformation and popularized work of modern apocalyptic narratives arose one man known as Abu Musab al-Suri who would begin to blur the lines between the two. While he cannot be given all the credit for combining jihad with messianic belief in contemporary times, he has certainly played a large role in the development of modern apocalyptic jihad. It would appear that al-Suri was perhaps the only modern apocalyptic author who attempted to violently fight back against an Islamic government through the use of jihad. Born in Syria in 1958, al-Suri would go on to join the Muslim Brotherhood in fighting the Syrian government under the leadership of Hafez al-Assad.206 Though the fighting would be unsuccessful, by 1997 after living in exile in both Jordan and Iraq, al-Suri found a new home in Afghanistan under the protection of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. He remained there until the American invasion in 2001. Moving across the Middle East, al-Suri would complete The Call to Global Islamic Resistance in 2004—a work that has since inspired a slew of jihadists inspire to fight against the foreign invaders.207

Within this text were over a hundred pages on “the most important prophetic indications, reported in tradition [Sunna] on the end times.”208 Perhaps known as one of the leading authors for justifying jihad of the sword, al-Suri may have been under the impression that the Final Hour was at hand and that jihad should be used in the wake of it. Within the writing, al-Suri makes mentions to his messianic belief writing.

206 Ibid., 186.
207 Ibid., 187.
208 Ibid., 188.
The earth is filled with oppression and injustice and the events lead on from one another toward the appearance of the Mahdi...For jihad is an obligation until the advent of the Hour. The community that fights for what is true and just will be victorious...and it will persevere until the last of its members fights the Antichrist, a constant command of our religion...The twentieth century is past, and we have now entered the twenty-first to find that most people seem prepared to follow the Antichrist.\textsuperscript{209}

Here, we find, that al-Suri not only believes that there are countless pieces of evidence to show that the Final Hour is drawing close, but also that jihad is justifiable and demanded until the Day of Judgement. This use of jihad, according to al-Suri, becomes ever more important when it is being conducted against the Dajjal—who had prepared the world to follow him during the Final Hour. For al-Suri the current state of the world had “entered into the age of battles and tribulations” and Muslims must prepare for the coming Final Hour by reverting back to living as piously as possible.\textsuperscript{210} Hoping to avoid dwelling on the ‘conspiracy’ theories that had plagued previous modern writers, such as UFOs and the Bermuda Triangle, al-Suri cites Burkari, Muslim, and Dawud’s hadith collection while also often referring to Nu’aym ibn Hammad’s work. Filiu points out that it is through these sources that al-Suri concludes that the final battles must take place in Syria [Sham] where “Al-Qaeda’s global jihad must be reoriented to take into account this final clash.”\textsuperscript{211}

While al-Suri criticizes Al-Qaeda for its failure to combat the American forces in 2001, he still finds it critical that the organization leading global jihad must prepare for the final battles to take place in Syria. This claim may have been influenced by his historical background and personal conflict with the Assad regime, but al-Suri is careful

\textsuperscript{209} Ibid., 188.
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., 189.
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 189.
to make his narrative reflect what is found in the classic sources. He does not make the same mistakes as previous modern apocalyptic authors by overreaching his range of sources and citations. Additional points of emphasis for al-Suri’s narrative discusses the Euphrates hadith, a gradual moral decay occurring in Muslim societies, corruption of Islamic scholars, the rise of Black Banners in the East which every believer should pledge their allegiance to, and the final confrontation between the Christian Byzantines and the final Muslims in Syria during the greatest and final apocalyptic battle—al-mahama al-kubra.  

Yet just under a year after The Call for Global Islamic Resistance was written and published, al-Suri’s name was taken off of America’s wanted terrorist list. There remains no explanation for what happened to al-Suri, but there are reports that he was killed shortly after releasing his work to the public. His death, however, occurred only after The Call for Global Islamic Resistance was uploaded onto the then increasingly popular media platform known as the Internet. It has since remained on-line where it has continued to be read by jihadists across the world as a source of guidance and authority on how to combat the West.

212 Ibid., 190-191.
Chapter 3: Apocalyptic Origins: From Al-Qaeda in Iraq to the Islamic State

The creators of the apocalypses, in addition to a personal need to express their own feelings, probably intended to influence public opinion, for example, in promoting political aims, social tendencies, or religious values. Apocalyptic traditions might...reflect the atmosphere prevailing among the fighters against the infidels, and serve as propaganda to attract warriors and inhabitants to areas of perpetual shedding of Muslims’ blood. No wonder that some such traditions are aimed against the Byzantines, the Rum, an actual threat and a traditional eschatological enemy.213

Ofer Livne-Kafri

By first providing the groundwork for why apocalyptic literature developed and how it radically transformed during the late 20th century, it now becomes crucial to look exclusively at the origins of the Islamic State for there being apocalyptic motivations in its formation and ongoing development in 2016. Through analyzing its earliest founders—such as Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi and al-Masri—its theology, and particularly its understanding of takfîrism, there is discovered an increase in violence toward Shi’a Muslims. This, I find, emerges alongside the Islamic State’s development in the 21st century from Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) to Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) and now in its present manifestation known as the Islamic State (ISIS).214 By constructing a timeline of the Islamic State and its gradual development from AQI to ISIS, we find that the group has undergone changes theologically and strategically—both largely influenced by messianic speculation.

These changes, I argue, seem to have been caused by advancements or slight alterations made to an apocalyptic narrative that the group was being influenced by.

214 Excommunication from the religion, or the pronouncement of one being an apostate or nonbeliever. Wood cites a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad told an early follower “If a man says to his brother, ‘You are an infidel,’ then one of them is right.” More recently this declaration has been used by Zarqawi and other jihadist to justify the killing of another Muslim, especially Shi’a Muslims.
While these changes, at times, can be minute and easily overlooked, analyzing ISIS from an apocalyptic context will help demonstrate that not only did the Islamic State possess an apocalyptic theology in its earliest years of existence, but that this theology has continuously been able to transform, adjust to current events, learn from past mistakes, and appears to have increasingly pursued higher levels of violence against Muslims and non-Muslims alike. By approaching the Islamic State’s formation and development from an apocalyptic context, there will also be additional evidence found for why the group had early discrepancies with Al-Qaeda, why it chose to establish a caliphate according to the “prophetic method,” and how ISIS has been able to expand its influence and territory despite a near collapse in 2010.

The Islamic State’s eventual split from Al-Qaeda, how it occurred, and what resulted because of it will help clarify distinct differences between end goals, theology, and recruitment strategies between the two organizations. These differences, I argue, have largely been a result of its outlook of the Islamic world, the future of the Islamic tradition in the 21st century, and how ISIS wanted to go about pursuing an Islamic caliphate. Through this method of approach, I will also point out how the political and sociocultural environment of Iraq and Syria in the 21st century may have been flooded with, as previous examples discussed have shown, high levels of anxiety, violence and warfare, distrust of an established government, and an increasingly perceived outbreak of a sectarian war due in large part to the agendas of Zarqawi, al-Masri, and now Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Due in large part to the initial theology and approach to establishing an Islamic the mind of Zarqawi, we discover that the appeal of igniting a sectarian war between Sunni
and Shi’a Muslims across the Middle East, fueled alongside a war against the United States, would both play a large part in the Islamic State developing a sudden appeal and fascination with the A’maq Cycle beginning in 2010. The combination of the Iraq War, Arab Spring, and the Syrian Civil War would provide the groundwork for connections to be made between the classic apocalyptic literature and current events. With this, ISIS would tap into the anxieties of the area and eventually the world to generate one of the most violent Islamist militant organizations to date—one that believed the Final Hour was rapidly approaching and action was needed.

This chapter will stress the reasons why ISIS changed its apocalyptic narrative from awaiting the return of the Mahdi between 2007-2010, to now being motivated by the A’maq Cycle—which concludes with the return of Jesus prior to the Final Hour, a fitna between Shi’a and Sunni Muslims, and the battle of al-malhamah al-kubra against the Byzantine Christians. This theological change to the Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative brought with it a revival of attention on the Dajjal, who he would be, and how he would attempt to destroy the Islamic tradition. With this revitalized speculation on the Dajjal, ISIS seems to have been provided new justification for attacking the West, Middle Eastern governments, and any Muslim (Sunni or Shi’a) who did not pledge allegiance to the caliphate.

The latter justification has, through this new apocalyptic inspiration, been understood as deeming all Muslims (that do not give allegiance) as apostates or nonbelievers. With this, ISIS seems to have begun attempting to purify the region, religion, and world of all non-belief and human law. By refocusing its narrative around the A’maq Cycle and establishing a caliphate under the leadership Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Islamic State
positioned itself above all jihadist organizations (including Al-Qaeda), demanded *ba’yah* from every Muslim (if denied they were not justifiable to be killed), and now placed enemies under the influence of the Dajjal who was attempting to destroy the Islamic tradition.

This shift in apocalyptic narrative has adapted over the course of the 21st century and even seems to have learned from previous mistakes of previous apocalyptic movements—including the Islamic State in Iraq. With belief in the approaching appearance of the Mahdi, ISI nearly watched itself be destroyed after the failure of the Mahdi’s appearance. As shown in chapter 2, the appeal of the Mahdi can result in any man claiming the title—especially if his name is Muhammad Abdullah (prophesized to be the Mahdi’s name). Once this occurs, there comes the strong possibility of the proclaimed Mahdi being killed in battle, resulting in a loss of energy and appeal amongst the followers. With the A’maq Cycle, however, ISIS removed the notion of the Mahdi and began to focus on the return of Jesus—who will be clearly recognized upon his return. In this way, ISIS has been able to shift its messianic speculation accordingly and has benefited greatly from it. The sudden death of a man claiming to be the Mahdi or, as ISI learned, the failure of the Mahdi to appear both can (and often do) result in widespread loss of appeal, energy, and legitimacy from observers and potential recruits.

By pinpointing apocalyptic influences in the formation and development of the Islamic State, I show that ISI has been influenced by end time speculations and its role in bringing in the Final Hour—a time where the Islamic tradition would rule the world by God’s decree.
Abu Mus’ab al-Zaqarwi and the Formation of AQI

While the Islamic State caught the attention of most of the Western world and media outlets in 2014 with the beheading of the American hostage James Foley, the roots of the terrorist organization date much further back than this infamous video. The history of the Islamic State is quite complicated and ISIS has only recently begun to be studied as an entirely separate organization from Al-Qaeda. As recently as 2014, when ISIS first made a global appearance, President Obama still referred to the group as Al-Qaeda’s “JV [Junior Varsity] team” in effort to delegitimize the notion that the Islamic State may be a separate or more powerful enemy than Al-Qaeda. Yet this analysis of the group may, in fact, be providing the wrong approach for combatting the Islamic State, analyzing its motives, and predicting its future actions. Graeme Wood, in What ISIS Really Wants, cautions that such a “monolithic” view of ISIS (as Al-Qaeda 2.0 or its “JV team”) causes “confusion about the group, and may have contributed to significant strategic errors” so far.215

The prevailing interpretation from scholars and government officials claiming that they know what the goals and agendas really are of terrorist organizations has possibly created a static paradigm for how Westerners analyze the Islamic State. Wood describes such a process as the attempt to “apply the logic of Al-Qaeda to an organization that has decisively eclipsed it.”216 This has become an extremely problematic approach to the Islamic State who “follows a distinctive variety of Islam whose beliefs about the path to the Day of Judgment matter to its strategy” which when taken seriously “can help the

216 Ibid., 2.
West know its enemy and predict its behavior.” In this manner, taking the Islamic State at its word—a group heavily influenced by the end of the world—there becomes new avenues shaped for understanding its formation, history, development, theology, strategies, and aspirations. By taking the Islamic State at its word, we are also provided opportunities for analyzing its possible fears, anxieties, understanding of the world around them, and may be able to discover possible long-term resolutions to prevent further end time speculation from spreading across the region.

By looking back at the founders of the first manifestations of the Islamic State in the 21st century, there is evidence of early apocalyptic references existing and motivating the trajectory of the group through gradual changes made to its narrative. The first point of reference for understanding the current manifestation of the Islamic State today begins the leader and founder of AQI—Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi—though he himself would never observe the manifestation of what his early influences would become.

At the heart and root of the Islamic State’s conception is the theology that was passed down by Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi—especially his understanding of takfīr and the killing of Shi’a Muslims. Zarqawi remains relevant to the Islamic State today and is referred to as Shaykh al-Zaqarwi within media outlets. This persistent influence on the group’s trajectory after his death in 2006 sheds additional light on the underlining thoughts, tactics, and theology of the Islamic State throughout the 21st century—including the opinion that the world must be purified of all nonbelievers. Therefore, understanding the origins of ISIS must begin with the life and early career of Zarqawi and the theological views he possessed when forming AQI in 2004.

The life of Zaqarwi, originally named Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal al-Kalaylah, starts with a

217 Ibid., 3.
Jordanian man covered in tattoos, known by locals in the town as a drunk, a street fighter, and a man who spent the majority of his early life being arrested for crimes including drug possession and sexual assault. Zarqawi, at this point in his life, would be far from the jihadist who led attacks against American forces at the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, was given the title of “The Shaykh of Slaughters,” eventually become one of the higher ranking members of Al-Qaeda, and would be the master mind behind civilian attacks across Iraq against Shi’a populations.

The radical change that Zarqawi underwent came directly after his time locked in a jail cell for drug possession. The shift in lifestyle initially began after deciding to join an “Islamic reviverlist organization” named Tablighi Jammat, that Zaqarwi hoped would allow him to become more pious Muslim. Another account notes that his mother forced him to begin taking religious courses in Amman after being arrested, and that it would be there that Zarqawi was first introduced to the doctrine of Salafism. After spending time studying Salafism and its argument that Muslim society needs to revert back to living as closely to the example of the Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslim community, Zarqawi decided to leave Jordan for Afghanistan in 1989 out of desire for performing jihad against the Soviet Union.

He, however, would arrive too late and only witnessed the Soviet Union’s army leaving the region. Despite not seeing combat, Zaqarwi ended up spending his time in

\[218\] Stern and Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, 13-14. “He would later try to remove them [the tattoos] with hydrochloric acid.”
\[220\] Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 2. “A doctrine that in its contemporary form advocates a return to theological purity and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. Salafists deem Western-style democracy and modernity not only fundamentally irreconcilable with Islam, but the main pollutants of the Arab civilization.”
Afghanistan advancing another skill, namely “working on jihadist newsletters.” This early work with media distributions may further explain the reasoning that while in control of AQI, Zarqawi would use the Internet and other media platforms to spread his message and appeal to recruits. It would be during the early 21st century that Zarqawi began releasing a number of beheading videos onto the Internet, a tactic that we now know has remained quite relevant the Islamic State’s own media.

It would be also while living in Afghanistan that Zarqawi would make two important connections with other top level jihadists. Zarqawi would meet two men who both played significant roles in the September 11th attacks. These men were Khalid Mohammad (a main plotter of 9-11) and Mohammad Shobana “who published a jihadist magazine called Al-Bunyan Al-Marsus (the impenetrable Edifice).” These early connections would heavily influence the future actions of Zarqawi. One account of an interview conducted between journalist Mar Anne Weaver and a jihadist member with Zarqawi at this time recounted, “It’s not so much what Zarqawi did in the jihad [at this time]—it’s what the jihad did for him.” These early connections made in Afghanistan would provide Zarqawi with his first taste of what jihad was in the modern world, as well as a deeper appreciation for the use of media outlets in recruitment efforts. It would, however, be who Zarqawi met and shared a jail cell with in Jordan between 1993 and 1999 that extraordinarily influenced his future decisions, theology, and understanding of the use of force.

As briefly discussed in the previous chapter, Zarqawi would share his Jordanian cell with Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi—whose brother-in-law had been a supporter of

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222 Ibid., 14.
223 Weiss and Hassan, ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror, 6.
224 Stern and Berger, ISIS: The State of Terror, 15.
Juhayman’s siege on Mecca in 1979.\textsuperscript{225} Maqdisi, while no affiliation with the siege on Mecca, was a strong supporter of using media outlets and publications to reach out to potential recruits. In his publication \textit{Democracy: A Religion} would, Maqdisi claimed western styles of government were in direct opposition to the laws mandated by God and thus should be resisted by any means necessary.\textsuperscript{226} This, we find, has been a cause for messianic uprisings and would continue to be the focus of the Islamic State’s media today.

While the two men eventually would have a falling out due to the violent actions conducted against Shi’a Muslims by Zaqarwi in Iraq, the two men appeared to have become close friends at this time. Maqdisi was well known for his knowledge of classic texts and became one of the leading scholars amongst jihadists on a number of issues. This even included discussing apocalyptic speculation amongst members, including telling these Al-Qaeda members that the “faithful” Muslims would arrive in Syria during the end times.\textsuperscript{227} While there is no certainty that Zarqawi adopted any apocalyptic views and expectations of the future in this jail cell directly from Maqdisi, his time spent amongst a multitude of other jihadists was a transformative time for Zarqawi. Nir Rosen, an interviewer of imprisoned jihadists at this jail, described the situation as such:

Their time in prison was as important for the moment as their experiences in Afghanistan were, bonding the men who suffered together and giving them time to formulate their ideas. For some, it was educational as well. One experienced jihadi who knew Zarqawi in Afghanistan told me: When I heard Zarqawi speak, I didn’t believe this is the same Zaqarwi. But six years in jail gave him a good chance to educate himself.\textsuperscript{228}

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\textsuperscript{225} Trofimov, \textit{The Siege of Mecca}, 249.  \\
\textsuperscript{226} Weiss and Hassan, \textit{ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror}, 8.  \\
\textsuperscript{228} Stern and Berger, \textit{ISIS: The State of Terror}, 16. 
\end{flushright}
Zarqawi’s time in jail allowed him to safely learn under the guidance of jihadists who had fought in Afghanistan and leading Salafi scholars, such as Maqdisi. In this way Zarqawi was surrounded by the leading minds on global jihadism. The ability for prisoners to freely discuss difficulties in battle, theology, and future strategies for combatting enemies in the safe confine of a jail cell proved quite effective in turning low level jihadists into full fledge leaders in a short time frame. Jail cells would soon become a “University” for jihadists and helped elevate Zarqawi to the forefront of the revitalization of jihad against the West beginning at the end of the 20th century. By 1999, only six years after being placed in jail, Zarqawi would strike luck and was freed from the jail following the death of Jordan’s King Hussein who had arrested Zarqawi. The newly appointed King Abdullah II offered amnesty for “around three thousand prisoners, excepting the worst offenders such as murderers, rapists, and traitors. Many Islamists who hadn’t actually committed terrorism against the crown were freed, al-Zarqawi among them.”

Soon after being released Zarqawi, however, made his way back to Afghanistan. This time he would meet the leader of Al-Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden. Reports note that the two initially did not meet eye to eye on a number of theological and strategical issues—especially in regard to Zarqawi’s belief that Shi’a Muslims were apostates and should be at the forefront of Al-Qaeda’s attacks. Osama Bin Laden, however, believed that the focus of Al-Qaeda efforts should remain on combatting the “far enemy” (America). Bin Laden saw the attacking of other Muslims, especially civilians, as problematic and a quick way of losing global appeal from amongst the Muslim populations. Yet, Zarqawi

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229 A similar result would be the case with the current ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who experienced a transformation during his time at Camp Bucca during the early 21st century.
230 Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 11.
remained insistent throughout his later life that the focus of attacks should be on the “near enemy” (Shi’a Muslims in particular) and that the goal should be to purify the religion of nonbelief and apostasy before combatting the West.\footnote{Ibid., 12.}

This strategy of attacking other Muslims was one that Bin Laden strongly opposed throughout the 21\textsuperscript{st} century and remained an issue even with ISI and ISIS until his death. Bin Laden, rather, remained focused on combatting what he saw as the increasing influence of Western nations in the Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia where the holy cities of Mecca and Medina were positioned. Yet even with this disagreement between Bin Laden and Zarqawi, the former recognized that the latter would still provide needed help to Al-Qaeda’s goals—especially with the contacts Zarqawi had in regions outside of Afghanistan. With Zarqawi providing Al-Qaeda the benefit of having contacts in areas like Jordan, Bin Laden agreed to provide Zarqawi with “a training camp in Herat, Afghanistan’s third largest city…built with Al-Qaeda startup money, and according to former CIA analyst Nada Bakos, who estimates that Bin Laden granted al-Zarqawi $200,000 in the form of a loan.”\footnote{Ibid., 13.} In this way the two formed an alliance and Zarqawi was now in possession of recruits, cash, and a safe haven to prepare planning for the future.

Zarqawi, in the confines of his new camp, would form \textit{Jund al– Sham} (Soldiers of the Levant) and would place a banner above the entrance of the camp reading Monotheism and Jihad.\footnote{Ibid., 13. This would become the name of his jihadist organization in Iraq at the start of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.} Despite the newly formed alliance between Zarqawi and Bin Laden, Zarqawi continued to refuse giving his oath of allegiance to Al-Qaeda’s leader.\footnote{Stern and Berger, \textit{ISIS: The State of Terror}, 21.}
member of Al-Qaeda later reported the alliance was simply a “marriage of convenience” but not an alliance.\textsuperscript{235} It would, however, be after the American invasion of Afghanistan following the attacks of 9-11 that Zarqawi would undertake new orders from Bin Laden. In anticipation of America going to Iraq next, Zarqawi fled Afghanistan and was in Iraq by 2002. In Iraq, Zarqawi would soon become a household name amongst jihadists and Western government officials. The Bush administration at one point claimed (prior to the Iraq War), that Zarqawi was the link between Al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein and was used as one of the many justifications for arguing that Saddam was housing terrorist cells.\textsuperscript{236} Whether or not this was true remains unknown, but what is recognized is that Zarqawi would soon establish Al-Qaeda’s branch in Iraq under the blessing of Bin Laden.

It would seem that Zarqawi became increasingly convinced of the important role that the region of Iraq would play for future events. There have recently been found writings from Al-Qaeda members, including Saf al-Adl, discussing Zarqawi’s appeal for Iraq and how it came about. In one letter, Saf al-Adl mentions that Zarqawi’s plan for the future of the Islamic world may have developed from his sudden interest in the medieval Caliph Nur al-Din Zengi. Saf writes, “[Zarqawi] was always asking for any book available about Nur al-Din…I believe that what he read about Nur al-Din and his launch from Mosul in Iraq played a big role in influencing…his [own] decision to go to Iraq after the fall of the Islamic emirate in Afghanistan.”\textsuperscript{237}

Nur al-Din is historically known for his decisive victories against crusader armies during the Middle Ages and his establishment of a Caliphate spanning from Iraq into Syria. More recently, Nur al-Din’s mosque in Mosel would become a major spot for the

\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{237} McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse, 9.
Islamic State. This mosque was thought to have been where al-Din launched his campaign against the crusaders and was where the caliphate had been established centuries prior. In 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi would come to this mosque and give his only public recorded sermon. He declared:

> The sun of jihad has risen, and the glad tidings of goodness have shone forth. Triumph looms on the horizon, and the signs of victory have appeared. Here, the flag of the Islamic State, the flag of monotheism, rises and flutters. Its shade covers land from Aleppo to Diyala. Beneath it the walls of the tyrants have been demolished, their flags have fallen, and their borders have been destroyed…It is a dream that lives in the depths of every Muslim believer. It is a hope that flutters in the heart of every mujahid [performing jihad] monotheist. Now the caliphate has returned. We ask God the exalted to make it in accordance with the prophetic method.  

In tribute to Zarqawi, the Islamic State would use this mosque to declare the [re]establishment of the caliphate. It would be at the very spot that many believe Nur al-Din launched his own campaign against the crusader armies under the black banner of the Abbasids. It would appear al-Baghdadi wanted to show that the initial motivations of Zarqawi had come full circle and were being fulfilled. What appears certain is that Zarqawi was influenced, during the early 21st century, by the belief that Iraq would be where a new campaign would be launched against the present day crusaders—i.e. America.

Anticipating the American invasion provided Zarqawi the advantage of establishing a foothold in Iraq prior to 2003 where he would be under threat of American military forces. When the appearance of American forces finally occurred in 2003, Zarqawi wasted no in conducting his planned out attacks, bombings, and suicide attacks across Iraq against Americans, Iraqi officials, and Shi’a civilians. Zarqawi and his newly constructed off branch of Al-Qaeda (since he had yet given his oath of allegiance to Bin

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238 Ibid., 121-122.
Laden) “Monotheism and Jihad,” claimed responsibility for a series of suicide bombing attacks against Western embassies, a UN mission center, as well as the holy Shi’a mosque of Imam Ali—where ninety people were killed including the high ranking Shi’a cleric Ayatollah Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim.239

In this way, Zarqawi would remain focused on attacking both the “far enemy” and “near enemy.” At one point, Zarqawi even referred to Shi’a Muslims as servants to the Dajjal alongside the American forces.240 Yet these attacks would only further create tension between Zarqawi and Al-Qaeda. In one letter Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda’s second in command and current leader, told Zarqawi that their strategy should remain on “removing the Americans and establishing an Islamic emirate or caliphate in Iraq…[and keeping] popular support from the Muslim masses in Iraq and surrounded countries” because “in the absence of this popular support the Islamic mujahidin movement would be crushed in the shadows.” 241

Al-Qaeda leaders began to fear that the attacks on Shi’a mosques and the killing of civilians would result in a loss of appeal from throughout the Islamic world and only provide Western forces more justification for sending their armies into the Middle East. Zarqawi, however, remained fixated on attacking the Shi’a populations and believed that a sectarian war between the two sects of Muslims needed to occur before the American forces could be fully combatted. By 2004 in result of the sudden wide scale violence erupting across Iraq, the increase of Western forces, fallout from the toppling of Saddam Hussein’s regime, and the subsequent Western establishment of a predominantly Shi’a government, Zarqawi would finally give his oath of allegiance (bay’ah) to Bin Laden.

239 Stern and Berger. ISIS: The State of Terror, 2.
240 McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse, 10.
241 Ibid., 12.
In result, Zarqawi began pulling back on attacking predominately Shi’a regions of Iraq. After giving his allegiance to Bin Laden, Zarqawi’s Monotheism and Jihad would finally merge with Al-Qaeda to produce Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in late 2004. Following this merger Zarqawi publically stated, “Our noble brothers in Al-Qaeda understand the strategy of the Monotheism and Jihad group in the land of two rivers, the land of the caliphs and their hearts are overjoyed by its method there…perhaps [it would establish] the caliphate according to the prophetic method.”\textsuperscript{242} It would appear that Zarqawi’s eyes were turning toward the establishment of a caliphate and with this belief soon came a revival of attacks on Shi’a Muslims despite his allegiance to Bin Laden.

From Al-Qaeda in Iraq to the Islamic State in Iraq

While it is important to understand the vast amount of details on what occurred in Iraq under the leadership of Zarqawi, the scope of this research is not broad enough to cover every major battle, death, or disagreement between Bin Laden and Zarqawi. Rather, the purpose here is to look exclusively how AQI formed under the guidance of Zarqawi, whose strategy centered on igniting sectarian war—a strategy that became more radicalized as AQI developed into ISI and later into ISIS. Despite lessening the attacks on Shi’a civilians and giving his allegiance to Bin Laden, Zarqawi eventually fell back into his old habits. After increasing the targeting Shi’a populations, now under the banner of Al-Qaeda, Zarqawi would begin to be further cautioned by Al-Qaeda and Zawahiri in particular. Zawahiri warned him, “Why kill ordinary Shi’a considering that they are forgiven because of their ignorance? And what loss will befall us if we did not attack the

\textsuperscript{242} Ibid., 12.
Another leader, Atiyya Abd al-Rahman, reportedly wrote to Zarqawi telling him that “policy must be dominant over militarism” since “this is one of the pillars of war that is agreed upon by all nations, whether they are Muslims or unbelievers.”

Despite these warnings from Al-Qaeda leaders, Zarqawi only increased his attacks on both American and Shi’a forces. A letter intercepted in Iraq by Kurdish forces notes Zarqawi describing his hatred and distrust of Shi’a Muslims, “The insurmountable obstacle, the lurking snake, the crafty and malicious scorpion, the spying enemy, and the penetrating venom…The unhurried observer and inquiring onlooker will realize that Shi’ism is the looming danger and the challenge.”

For Zarqawi, the main objective of his violence remained starting a civil war between Sunni and Shi’a Muslims and how forming an Islamic state would come in direct result from the support of Sunni Muslims who were forced into the civil war. Another letter from Zarqawi states, “Targeting and hitting Shia in their religious, political, and military depth to provoke them to show the Sunnis their rabies and bare the teeth of the hidden rancor working in their breast. If we succeed in dragging them into the arena of sectarian war, it will become possible to awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger and annihilating death” at the hands of the Shi’a.

In line with his attacking of Shi’a Muslims across Iraq, Zarqawi would also begin using the Internet to begin appealing to recruits. As early as 2004 Zarqawi began displaying beheading videos, a tactic that has become one of the staple points of the Islamic State today. In one of his earliest videos Zarqawi broadcasted himself personally

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243 Ibid., 13.
244 Ibid., 13.
246 Ibid., 29.
beheading a captured American contractor named Nicholas Berg. While the beheading videos that have been released by ISIS today do not openly show the violent act, Zarqawi’s video never framed away from the execution and depicted the entire beheading for everyone to witness.\textsuperscript{247} Following the release of the video, AQI would proceed to release at least eighty other execution videos, some often showing the killing of more than one individual.\textsuperscript{248} These videos would not receive the support from Al-Qaeda leaders, who again feared that the image being shown to the world would only damage their appeal to Muslim masses. Zawahiri wrote to Zarqawi in 2005, “You shouldn’t be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and their description of you as the Shaykh of the slaughterers…We are in battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media.”\textsuperscript{249}

Al-Qaeda’s leaders became aware of the ripple effects these videos could have on their future, yet the videos never would reach the global appeal that the beheading of James Foley did. Zarqawi’s videos came during a time where it would prove more difficult to broadcast videos to a global audience. There was no Twitter, no Facebook, and the Internet had yet to popularize as it has today. These early videos, however, are important to note by how we are able to see how their format and usage were later adopted and tweaked by the Islamic State. While the videos seem to have served as an important recruitment tool for the Islamic State today, the beheadings of Western and Shi’a captives by AQI would become another source of tension between Zarqawi and Bin Laden.

These strategies and the negative feedback they brought with them soon appeared to begin damaging widespread support for Zarqawi’s movement. The growing lack of

\textsuperscript{247} Stern and Berger, \textit{ISIS: The State of Terror}, 2.
\textsuperscript{248} Ibid., 104.
\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., 105.
support would even include his former teacher, spiritual guide, and cellmate al-Maqdisi who told Zarqawi, “The clean hands of mujahidin should be protected from being tarnished with the blood of the protected people.”

Yet knowing how successful the Islamic State’s videos have become today, it may have only been a result of lack of access that prevented the videos from becoming a leading source of recruitment for AQI. Zarqawi’s strategies seemed to have only been damaging support to his cause, but he would soon be revitalized by a sudden increase of widespread anxiety towards Iran’s involvement in Iraq and the toppling of Saddam Hussein’s government.

Rumors of an Iran-American alliance forming to destabilize Iraq began to become more popular following the increase of Shi’a leaders being placed into government positions of power. This alongside the sudden appearance of Shi’a militias in Iraq, such as the Mahdi Army, only fueled the extensive anxiety on what was occurring across Iraq. These actions would prove only further fuel Zarqawi’s speculation that a sectarian civil war was on the verge of breaking out across the Middle East. With this, he only increased his attacks. Yet Zarqawi was not the only one who was seeing a sudden transformation of Iraq’s government into being predominately run by Shi’a Muslims. A former adviser to US military stated, “It is common in the Arab world to hear talk of secret deals between Iran and the United States, and mantes that the US ‘gave Iraq to Iran.’” At nearly the same time a leaked document from a White House National Security Council to President Bush from 2006 was discovered and stated a similar mindset on what was occurring:

Reports of non-delivery of services to Sunni areas, intervention by the prime minister’s office to stop military action against Shiite targets and to encourage them against Sunni one, removal of Iraq’s most effective commanders on a sectarian basis, and efforts to ensure Shiite majorities in all ministries—when

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250 Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 31-32.
251 Ibid., 57.
combined with the escalation of [Mahdi Army] killings—all suggest a campaign to consolidate Shiite power in Baghdad.\footnote{252}{Ibid., 60.}

The surge of Shi’a Iraqis into positions of power, the sudden increase of Shi’a militias entering into Iraq, and a rise in violence occurring between Sunni, Shi’a, and American forces ultimately lead to a nation rampant with anxiety, distress of the government, and was filled with violence and warfare. All of these underlining issues would not only give credence for Zarqawi’s mission and strategy but would also pave the way for the initial support that ISI received from Sunni Muslims living in Iraq. The authors of ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror note that this early skepticism towards the influence of Iran in Iraq’s government would be one of the “primary reasons that Sunnis have been attracted to ISIS” in Iraq.\footnote{253}{Ibid., 57.}

Iraq in the matter of a few short years would nearly ignite into the very outcome that Zarqawi was aspiring for—an all-out war between Sunni and Shi’a Muslims. This was also occurring alongside the presence of American forces and may have provided space for initial apocalyptic speculation to arise. In fact it would be during this time that Zaqrwi, looking to the future, made the statement placed at the front of every Dabiq magazine, “The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify—by Allah’s permission—until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq.” Perhaps Zarqawi foresaw a civil war spreading outside of Iraq would soon engulf the entire Middle East. What is certain is that he was keenly aware of the apocalyptic context and role of Dabiq during the Final Hour. As Zarqawi had envisioned the invasion of Iraq before it occurred, he would begin looking toward Syria as being the next area of conflict.

\footnote{252}{Ibid., 60.}
\footnote{253}{Ibid., 57.}
Zarqawi, in April of 2006, would make his last impressions on the future development of the Islamic State. At this time Zarqawi decided to call together a council made up from a variety of different jihadist organizations existing in Iraq. He described the meeting as the “nucleus for establishing an Islamic state” and that it this establishment would occur in three months.\textsuperscript{254} This assertion and plan was directly opposite of Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda. By this point, Al-Qaeda was under the belief that the American forces and Iraqi government should be removed prior to any attempt for establishing a state in Iraq. In line with this thought, Al-Qaeda needed to gather as much support from Muslim populations as possible before establishing an Islamic state. Zarqawi, however, believed that the Islamic state should be established first and it would gain support from amongst Muslims after its announcement.

On June 7, 2006, however, a US drone strike would end the aspirations and life of Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi by dropping a “five-hundred pound laser-guided bomb on [his] location, followed by a second, satellite-guided munition.”\textsuperscript{255} Following the sudden and un-expected death of Zarqawi, AQI’s quickly placed Abu Ayyub al-Masri in command of AQI. Just a few months after taking the helm, al-Masri would attempt to fulfill Zarqawi’s prediction and in October publically declared the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). With this announcement, al-Masri declared that all Iraqi Muslims should now give their oath of allegiance to Abu Umar al-Baghdadi. With this declaration, al-Masri would also begin a series of movements and strategies focused specifically on his own messianic belief. For al-Masri, the Mahdi was going to return at any moment and an Islamic state needed to be established before his return.

\textsuperscript{254} McCants, \textit{The ISIS Apocalypse}, 15.
\textsuperscript{255} Weiss and Hassan, \textit{ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror}, 61.
Al-Masri and the Apocalyptic Appeal of the Islamic State in Iraq

A large component of ISI and later ISIS is the apocalyptic appeal that it fashioned early on in the group’s formation, the sources it was inspired by during its development, and how the group adamantly believed that it was going to establish a caliphate according to a prophetic method prior to the return of the Mahdi. The majority of these beliefs, while possibly being the motivations of Zarqawi, only came to fruition when AQI and ISI were under the leadership of Abu Ayyub al-Masri. One of the largest contributions that al-Masri gave to the present manifestation of the Islamic State has been arguably its adoption of the black flag, and the reasoning behind the choice for its color and wording.

When ISI was formed in 2006 it possessed no separate flag of its own as most jihadist organizations do. By as early as 2007, however, ISI decided to adopt a black flag with white lettering reading “There is no god but God, Muhammad is his Prophet” (known as the shahada or testimony of faith) as its flag of choice. Around the latter part of the shahada was a white circle.256 The reasoning behind this specific choice in color came from the notion that the Prophet Muhammad was believed to have used black flags during his own life and battles against the Quraysh tribes. While the original Al-Qaeda flag is also black and possesses the shahada on it, the flag created by ISI (still used by ISIS today) purposely placed the white circle into its design to signify that ISI possessed the seal of the Prophet Muhammad. McCants’s points out that this slight decision to incorporate the white seal into its flag was to tell the world that “the Islamic State had inherited the Prophets seal, just as the early caliphs had.”257

Rather than design a flag of nationalism, this flag was meant to encompass the idea

that all Muslims would live under the flag of the Prophet and the Islamic tradition. The addition of the white seal signified that ISI believed it had received the ability to rule as an Islamic state. It was no longer the flag of Al-Qaeda but rather the flag of Islam. McCants’s also states that ISI quoted Ahmad Cevdet Pash to support further reasoning behind its flag, “The secret in creating a flag is that it gathers people under a single banner to unify them, meaning that this flag is a sign of the coming together of their words and a proof of unity in their hearts. They are like a body and what knits them together is stronger than the bond of blood relatives.”

In this way the Islamic State in Iraq was making a direct appeal at showing they were conducting themselves as closely to the example of the Prophet Muhammad and that all Muslims were united under the Islamic tradition, not nationalities or other jihadist organizations. Yet beyond this understanding of its flag were also more apocalyptic implications for its flag choice. Being specifically used by the Abbasids in the rebellion against the Umayyad empire around 747-750 C.E., black flags adopted an apocalyptic context within the Islamic tradition over the course of time. The most popular apocalyptic narrative dealing with the flags was produced during the Abbasid revolt and reads, “The black banners will come from the East, led by men like mighty camels, with long hair and long beards; their surnames are taken from the names of their hometowns and their first names are kunyas. [In the form of Abu so-and-so] If you see the black banners coming from Khorasan go to them immediately even if you must crawl over ice because indeed among them is the caliph, al-Mahdi.”

McCants points out that while apocalyptic speculation was mostly non-existent

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258 Ibid., 21.
259 Ibid., 26.
amongst Al-Qaeda’s leaders prior to ISI, that this may be a reflection on Bin Laden and Zawahiri’s “generation and class.”²⁶⁰ Both men had come from outside of Iraq and Syria, where the classic traditions place the end time battles taking place, and both came from wealthier families. Bin Laden had himself viewed the Meccan rebellion of 1979 and its catastrophic failure following the death of the proclaimed Mahdi. This may have deterred Bin Laden from making the same mistakes when in leadership.

He had also grown up a part of the wealthy class of Saudis and may have never felt the urge to look to messianic speculations for changing the state of the world. Yet there are known accounts of captured Al-Qaeda members, often lower ranking members, making references to the classic prophecy of the black flags. Ali al-Bahlul supposedly mentioned the battles of Armageddon while in Guantanamo Bay, while a body guard of Bin Laden told the FBI “If you see the black banners coming from Khorasan, join the army,” and Fadil Harun (Somalia’s leader of Al-Qaeda) wrote “The Islamic armies must gather, rely on God, and support His religion…an ideological struggle, which will continue until the Hour as long as an inch of Muslim land in the Holy Land is under control of the enemies.”²⁶¹

While apocalyptic speculation may have not been popular or flourishing under Bin Laden’s watch, there are examples of members being quite aware of classic apocalyptic sources and narrations on the Final Hour. One in particular is the account of the Black Banners/Flags that are supposed to appear before the Final Hour. As noted in chapter two, apocalyptic novels would have been flourishing at this point in history due largely to the events occurring in Iraq and across the Middle East. Undoubtedly these novels would

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 28.
²⁶¹ Ibid., 29.
have been influencing the public consciousness of Iraq’s society and the surrounding areas. The increase of American forces in Iraq, the worry that Iran was behind the decimation of Sunni leadership in Iraq’s government, and the increase of violence between the two groups would have certainly played right into the ideas that were being discussed in the apocalyptic novels being released at the time.

It would, however, be al-Masri who would not only magnify the apocalyptic speculation but also would capitalize on it when forming ISI in 2007. In the prayer led after the completion of the black flag design, ISI publically declared, “We ask God, praised be He, to make this flag the sole flag for all Muslims. We are certain that it will be the flag of the people of Iraq when they go to aid…the Mahdi at the holy house of God (Ka’ba).” In this way ISI was making a clear reference to the classic narration that the Mahdi would appear in front of the Ka’ba, as was proclaimed by Juhayman in 1979, and would usher in the apocalypse. McCants writes, “The Islamic State was signaling that its flag was not only the symbol of its government in Iraq and the herald of a future caliphate; it was the harbinger of the final battle at the End of Days.”

The founder of ISI, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, would continue to make open references to his belief in the approaching return of Mahdi and seems to have been deeply motivated by this notion. At one point he state, “We are the army that shall hand over the flag to the servant of God, the Mahdi.” McCants, in The ISIS Apocalypse, contends that it was this strong belief in the Mahdi that al-Masri decided to rush to establish the caliphate following the death of Zarqawi in 2006. He writes:

262 Ibid., 22.
263 Ibid., 22.
264 Ibid., 32.
He (Masri) 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 battle of the apocalypse. Anticipating the imminent conquest of major Islamic cities as foretold in the prophecies, Masri ordered his men to build pulpits for the Mahdi to ascent in the Prophet’s mosque in Medina, the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, and the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. He also 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.\textsuperscript{265}

For al-Masri the return of the Mahdi was coming and the Islamic world needed to begin preparing itself for it. It would seem that al-Masri was all too consumed with this belief and allowed it to bleed into every action and decision he was making. When challenged by other members within ISI for how devoted he had become to the Mahdi’s return, al-Masri would retort to them that the Mahdi would “come any day.”\textsuperscript{266} Very similar to the previous revolutions in Mecca and Sudan, al-Masri was tapping into apocalyptic speculation to further support ISI and creates a mass appeal for what it was trying to accomplish. His strategy of attempting to take control of Iraq in only three months, however, would end up depleting his army across to vast of an area and was soon recalled within “a week.”\textsuperscript{267}

In another example al-Masri was reported as announcing to members of ISI that “This war is in its early stages…and this is the beginning of the battles” prior to the Final Hour.\textsuperscript{268} This helps highlight how influenced the founder of ISI was by the appeal of the return of the Mahdi. It was not just the words that were coming out of his mouth but the actions that he was conducting around the Mahdi’s return. The belief that the Mahdi was going to return at any moment was a major factor behind the Islamic State in Iraq’s

\textsuperscript{265} Ibid., 32.  
\textsuperscript{266} Ibid., 32.  
\textsuperscript{267} Ibid., 32.  
\textsuperscript{268} Ibid., 32.
strategy, speeches, and design behind its flag choice. Under the leadership and messianic
guidance of al-Masri, ISI would also begin to establish strict *hudud* punishments within
the regions under its control in Iraq—a tactic that would later be adopted by ISIS
beginning in 2014.\(^{269}\)

McCants notes that the sudden use of these *hudud* punishments, despite ISI not
controlling any real territory, was an attempt to “burnish one’s ultraconservative
credentials and bolster one’s claims to be a state…Unfortunately for the Islamic State, it
was too zealous in applying the *hudud* and therefore scared too many people.”\(^{270}\) Yet al-
Masri was under the apocalyptic belief that the region and Islamic tradition needed to live
under Islamic Law as strictly as possible—especially with the Mahdi about to appear at
any moment. The use of *hudud* punishments, however, created more strife between ISI
and Al-Qaeda than it did build support for ISI’s claim to being a functioning state in Iraq.
Other members of ISI soon became aware of the apocalyptic expectations of al-Masri and
the devastating consequences it was having on the group’s future development.

Alongside the sudden use of *hudud* punishments on Iraqi civilians, al-Masri and ISI in
2007 began to attack Sunni tribes and other jihadist cells in Iraq that refused to give their
allegiance to ISI. One spokesman of ISI claimed that every Sunni Muslim must “join us
in forming the Islamic State project…or hand over their weapons to us before we are
forced to act against them forcefully.”\(^{271}\) ISI soon after began killing Sunni tribal leaders
and leaders of smaller militias that had refused to give *bay’ah* to the newly formed

\(^{269}\) These punishments include “beheading or crucifying bandits who kill people while robbing them; death
by stoning for adultery; cutting off a hand or foot for theft; and flogging for fornication and adultery,
drinking alcohol…[where] imposing the hudud, therefore, could burnish one’s ultraconservative credentials
and bolster one’s claims to be a state.”

\(^{270}\) Ibid., 38.

\(^{271}\) Ibid., 33.
Islamic State in Iraq. Whereas Zarqawi limited the majority of his attacks on Shi’a Muslims and American forces, ISI now began to include Sunni Muslims that were not offering their aid to them—another tactic that became magnified with ISIS more recently. In 2008, after the failed appearance of the Mahdi, ISI would also begin to lose internal support and legitimacy amongst other jihadists. McCants notes, “Chastened by his fail predictions that first year, Masri’s messianic ardor cooled. At the same time...Abu Umar al-Baghdadi became more substantial.”272

It would, however, be a mixture from all of these tactics and strategies that ISI would begin to slowly fade out of sight and lose its legitimacy of being an Islamic state. One former member of ISI, Abu Sulayman al-Utaybi, would eventually leave the group’s confines in Iraq and travel to Afghanistan to speak directly with Bin Laden, Zawahiri, and other Al-Qaeda leaders on the trajectory of ISI in the future. In his appeal to Al-Qaeda’s leaders, among a variety of issues raised against al-Masri’s leadership, was the amount of influence apocalyptic speculation was having in Masri’s view of the future. McCants notes that Sulayman previously wrote to Al-Qaeda’s leaders to warn them that al-Masri had become too heavily focused “about the tribulations [preceding the Day of Judgment], especially regarding the Mahdi” and that the Islamic State in Iraq was “approaching an abyss” if it remained under his control.273

The warning of Sulayman would prove to be true and by 2008 the group had witnessed itself becoming weaker than it had started as under the leadership of Zarqawi when it was still known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Yet oddly enough throughout the disastrous first attempt for establishing an Islamic state in the modern world, Bin Laden refused to

272 Ibid., 146.
273 Ibid., 40.
denounce ISI as being separate entity from Al-Qaeda and instead only made mention that “mistakes were made.”\textsuperscript{274} It would be in April 2010 that both al-Masri and the unknown other leader of ISI Abu Umar al-Baghdadi would be killed by a raid against their compound by both American and Iraqi forces. McCants notes that directly after the death of the two leaders “in the following three months thirty-four more Islamic State leaders would be killed or captured.”\textsuperscript{275}

McCants later notes that Abu Umar al-Baghdadi even may have possessed messianic speculations and was influenced by them during the first manifestation of the Islamic State. He notes that in April 2007 Umar al-Baghdadi publically stated that Iraqi troops would “aid the Mahdi clinging to the curtains of the Ka’ba.”\textsuperscript{276} This is thought to be a direct reference to a classic narration on how “tribes around the Ka’ba war with one another, each believing they have the mandate of heaven. Some flee the battle and find a man who has buried his face in the Ka’ba coverings, weeping. Because of the man’s purity, they pledge allegiance to him….the man turns out to be the Mahdi.”\textsuperscript{277} More interesting than this allusion to the Mahdi appearing is where the narration originated from, a classic book titled Kitab al-Fitan and was written by none other than Nu’aym Ibn Hammad and that “the Islamic State’s first emir succumbed to its gravitational pull is a testament to the apocalyptic fervor of the State’s founders.”\textsuperscript{278}

The Islamic State Reborn

In wake of the death of the leaders and founders of ISI, the organization nearly

\textsuperscript{274} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{275} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{276} Ibid., 142.
\textsuperscript{277} Ibid., 143.
\textsuperscript{278} Ibid., 143.
completely collapsed into history as just another group of jihadists. Yet it would be the result of the next leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who prevented the group from utter destruction following 2010. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, much like Zarqawi in the 1990’s, began his path of jihadism in the confines of a jail cell—Camp Bucca to be specific. Born in 1971 to a farming family, al-Baghdadi spent the first part of his adult life strictly studying the Islamic tradition, with a specific focus on “Qur’anic studies.” His master’s thesis would be focused on medieval recitation of the Qur’an, though it would take him nearly three years to finish the project. Yet it would be in 2004, after the invasion of American forces into Iraq, that al-Baghdadi would be arrested and detained by American soldiers.

Accounts claim that Baghdadi had been visiting a friend named Nessayif Numan Nessayif (the man targeted by American forces) during the time of his arrest. In a way Baghdadi became guilty by association and was also taken to Camp Bucca. One pentagon official is noted as claiming that Baghdadi was simply “a street thug” when he was picked up amongst other jihadists. This accidental arrest, however, would pave the way for how the Islamic State was able to rebound from its previous misfortunes under the leadership of al-Masri.

It would be while in Camp Bucca a jail—housing takfirist jihadists, moderate jihadists, accidental arrests like Baghdadi, and criminals picked off of the street—that al-Baghdadi would undergo a sudden transformation. Some accounts note that there were nearly 24,000 inmates within Camp Bucca during Baghdadi’s time with one inmate

279 Ibid., 74.
280 Ibid., 75.
281 Weiss and Hassan, ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror, 118-119
282 Stern and Berger, ISIS: The State of Terror, 34.
stating “We could have never all gotten together like this in Baghdad…it would have been impossibly dangerous. Here, we were not only safe, but we were only a few hundred meters away from the entire al-Qaeda leadership.”

In this way Baghdadi was surrounded by Al-Qaeda members, Saddam Hussein’s military officials, and hundreds of petty criminals who could be converted to radical interpretations of jihad and the use of force. In a similar manner that Zarqawi did in the 1990’s, Baghdadi used his time in the safe confines of a jail cell to further his understanding of the Islamic world and the increase of Western forces and governments in Islamic territory. This would only be further exasperated by how Baghdadi would quickly become a leader in the jail, a spiritual guide due to his educational background, and a middle man to settle disputes amongst members in the jail. One American general notes that it would be during this time that Baghdadi began plotting for the future and was “probably systematically organizing while he was in dentation. Building upon IOUs, getting to know whom to trust. He must have been plotting while he was incarcerated—he must have planned the whole rollout of the Islamic State.”

Baghdadi would use his short time in Camp Bucca to begin plotting and planning for what would eventually become the Islamic State. Accounts state that Baghdadi was especially interested in Shi’a Muslims and Sunni tribes that were helping the American forces with one narration finding he would openly declare, “Fighting them [other Muslim groups] is more of a priority than fighting the Americans.” The authors of ISIS: Insider the Army of Terror claim “His [Baghdadi] insistence on the need for fratricidal warfare—

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283 McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse, 75-76.
284 Ibid., 76.
286 Weiss and Hassan, ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror, 119.
or fitna between and among Sunnis—would remain a hallmark of al-Baghdadi’s leadership well into the expansion of ISIS into Syria and Iraq.”

Baghdadi would be freed from Camp Bucca by December 6, 2004 but not before he was able to establish himself as a leading voice on matters impacting Iraq and the Middle East within the jail cell and amongst its members. By as early as 2006 Baghdadi joined Al-Qaeda, become a member of Zarqawi’s constructed Mujahideen Shura Council, and then following the establishment of ISI in 2007 would become the head of “all Shari’a committees” in Iraq. Baghdadi, however, would remain at the lower levels of ISI leadership until the right opportunity presented itself—which occurred in 2010 following the death of al-Masri and Abu Umar al-Baghdadi. Following the vacancy left by the death of both founders of ISI, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was elected by nine of the eleven members of the Shura council as the next leader of the insurgency—due in large part to Baghdadi’s claimed ancestral ties to the Prophet Muhammad.

It, however, would not be until the Arab Spring in late 2010 that Baghdadi would be able to spread his influence from Iraq into Syria. The Arab Spring, at its core, was based on protests dealing with “inequality, corruption, and frustrations with injustices suffered under long-standing dictatorships.” These notions, anxieties, and skepticisms rampant across the Middle East would, by the end of 2013, result in the replacement of leaders in the nation-states of Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and led to protests and uprisings to occur in Syria. In wake of the widespread upheaval against the ruling regimes, and the influx of

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287 Ibid., 120.
288 Ibid., 119.
289 McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse, 76.
290 Ibid., 78.
291 Stern and Berger, ISIS: The State of Terror, 39.
292 Ibid., 39.
foreign recruits traveling though Syria during the Iraq War, Al-Qaeda told ISI to “form a group and send it to Syria”—in which Baghdadi agreed to and gave Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani the job of overseeing the operation. The newly established Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda adopted the name Nusra Front (Jabha al-Nusra). With the increase of destabilization across the region, most especially in Syria, militant movements began to flood into the areas of unrest in order to gain a foothold in the region.

This, however, did not occur all of a sudden but was rather slow and gradual process. William McCants notes that by 2012 “Nusra had only about two hundred operatives in Syria…But then things began to change. Nusra expanded in the north, becoming an insurgent group rather than a clandestine terrorist organization. The development made the group more sensitive to the need for popular support. It began avoiding suicide attacks on civilians and collaborated with the other Sunni insurgent groups.” In this way, Nusra began adapting and working with a variety of other small organizations in Syria—including the Free Syrian Army.

This began to separate the interests of Baghdadi and the Nusra leader of the time al-Jawlani. During this point, despite the differences and disputes between leaders, ISI was still understood as being Al-Qaeda’s branch in Iraq and that it should remain under the leadership of Zawahiri. The two groups, ISI and Nusra, also possessed drastically different approaches in how who was to be the combatted enemy. Baghdadi remained heavily influenced by takfirma and approached resolving the crises in the Middle East

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293 McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse, 85. McCants writes, “Syrian president Bashar al-Assad had funneled hundreds of jihadists into Iraq to fight against the United States. According to the U.S government, in 2007, 85 to 90 percent of the foreign fighters in Iraq had come through Syria. The Islamic State had received many of those fighters ad had maintained its facilitation network in Syria after the end of the Iraq War.”

294 Ibid., 85.

295 Weiss and Hassan, ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror, 42.
through the purification of the religion from all nonbeliever and apostates.

For example, in contrast to Baghdadi, al-Nusra tended to avoid attacking religious minorities (including the Yazidis), Shi’a Muslims, Sunni tribes, and even in some cases protected churches from Syria’s government and other rebel armies in the region. In this way, Nusra reflected the ideals of Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda on gathering support from the Muslim community against Western powers first and foremost. Yet, as we will see in Chapter 4, this approach would be the direct opposite of a strategy of ISIS. For the Islamic State would instead be focused on the “near enemy” and attempted to purify the Islamic religion before focusing its attention of Western forces. It would, however, not be until April 9, 2013 that the first official split between ISI and Al-Qaeda became increasingly apparent. Baghdadi publically proclaimed that a merger between Nusra and ISI had occurred and that he would now be the leader of both organizations. Yet this notion was never agreed upon between Baghdadi and Zawahiri (who had taken complete command of Al-Qaeda following the death of Bin Laden). Dispute over the matter continued over the year with Baghdadi rejecting Zawahiri’s demand that ISI and Nusra remain separate entities.

On February 2, 2014 Al-Qaeda would publically disavow ISIS and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi by stating, “ISIS is not a branch of Al-Qaeda group, we have no organizational relationship with it, and Al-Qaeda is not responsible for its actions.” Over the next few months Baghdadi’s ISIS would begin taking control of territory across Iraq and Syria, including the city of Raqqa. Later in June of 2014, Baghdadi’s forces would capture the city Mosul in Iraq and publically announce from the confines of the mosque of Nur al-

296 Ibid., 150.
298 Ibid., 43.
Din Zengi that boarders created by Western forces following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire between Iraq and Syria were now “destroyed,” that the national flags of the Middle East had “fallen,” and that the “Caliphate had returned…in accordance with the prophetic method.”

This declaration of the “prophetic method” was an attempt to claim that the caliphate was the fulfillment of prophecy. McCants notes that after this declaration “Across Syria and Iraq, billboards popped up at Islamic State checkpoints On the right side, the black flag…On the left side: The Islamic State: A Caliphate in Accordance with the Prophetic Method” with soldiers now bearing a patch with the slogan embroidered upon it.

Rather than focus on the return of the Mahdi, as ISI had done under the leadership of al-Masri, ISIS placed importance on the caliphate, which was established according to the “prophetic method.”

The Islamic State in this way never remained static in its apocalyptic speculation but rather adapted after viewing the devastation that the failed appearance of the Mahdi resorted in. McCants argues that a shift in how the group discussed the end times was a thought out and strategic move under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi—one that provided new avenues of recruitment for the Islamic State. McCants further argues this shift removed its focused from the Mahdi returning to suddenly emphasizing that there needed to be an established caliphate to begin establishing Islamic Law. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in this way, seems to have learned from the mistakes made by al-Masri. For al-Masri had placed all of his eggs in one basket—one that adamantly believed in the return of the Mahdi. Fearful of the same result occurring to ISIS, Baghdadi removed all

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300 Ibid., 126.
attention from the Mahdi and into a prophetic caliphate. McCants writes:

Caliph Baghdadi watched the first incarnation of the Islamic State nearly destroy itself because its leaders made hasty strategic decisions in the belief that the Mahdi would appear any day. Perhaps chastened by the experience, he has made the caliphate the locus of the group’s apocalyptic imagination rather than the Mahdi….The shift of eschatological emphasis from the person of the Mahdi to the institution of the caliphate buys the group more time to govern while sustaining the apocalyptic moment that has so captivated its supporters.301

In his concluding remarks McCants further elaborates upon the reasoning behind such a shift stating, “Messiah gave way for management. It was a clever way to prolong the apocalyptic expectations of the Islamic State’s followers while focusing them on the immediate task of state building…Although the messianic fervor has cooled in the Islamic State’s leadership, the group’s apocalyptic rhetoric has intensified”302 In this way, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi would use the lessons learned from predecessors, the Arab Spring, turmoil across Iraq, and the Syrian Civil War to usher in a more deadly, radicalized, and apocalyptically re-focused organization. By shifting focus now on the return of Jesus and the A’maq Cycle, Baghdadi’s ISIS could begin to state build and expand the caliphate without any time restrictions. Also, this shift avoided the possibility of ever having a proclaimed Mahdi appear and attempt to take power. It is in 2014 that we find ISIS referencing the A’maq Cycle, the region of Dabiq, the return of Jesus, and the appearance of the Dajjal. Benefiting from the increase of disorder and mayhem across the region, the removal of American forces, and the ongoing Syrian Civil War, al-Baghdadi would resuscitate ISI from the grave and establish the Islamic State—who now claimed to be in control of the caliphate—and would forever change the landscape of jihadist organizations.

301 Ibid., 143.
302 Ibid., 147.
Chapter 4: Analysis of *Dabiq* as Apocalyptic Literature

Although the overwhelming majority of Muslims today pay no heed to delusional prophecy, its gruesome fantasies furnish the basis for a paradoxically modern and increasingly influential ideology that relentlessly demonizes America as the absolute enemy of Islam. In the minds of the most impassioned believers, each bloody defeat draws the moment of ultimate and total triumph that much nearer. The end of the world is a serious matter—especially for those who are busy preparing for it.  

Jean-Pierre Filiu

The previous chapters attempted to provide the essential foundation for the development of Islamic eschatology, its transformation in the late 20th century, and examples of revolutionaries tapping into it for inspiration and guidance in modernity. Chapter Three then exclusively looked at the messianic ambitions the Islamic State possessed in the 20th century during its formation and development from AQI to ISI and now ISIS. We discovered that ISI was initially established on a belief that the Mahdi was going to return at any moment, but that this belief would later be replaced with the return of Jesus due to the near collapse the group experience following the failure of the Mahdi to appear when al-Masri predicted. With this shift in narrative, the Islamic State began to be increasingly influenced by the details found in the A’maq Cycle.

This shift brought with it resurgence and renewed justification for attacking Shi’a and Sunni populations, while also exemplifying a final confrontation between Muslims and Christians prior to the appearance of Jesus. The shift that occurred in this apocalyptic narrative provided the Islamic State with more time to state-build, avoid falling prey to inaccurate predictions on when the world would end, and provided theological justification for actions conducted that attempted to purify the Islamic religion. By understanding this shift in its apocalyptic narrative, it is now important to look exclusively at the Islamic State’s primary source *Dabiq* for evidence of apocalyptic

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nature not only existing but also influencing the group’s current actions, recruitment strategies, and its future aspirations.

Therefore, it becomes vital to attempt to avoid previous misinterpretations of the Islamic State that have arisen by dismissing its apocalyptic theology. This will be done by taking seriously that the Islamic State is using *Dabiq* to convey its apocalyptic message. By analyzing *Dabiq* as an apocalyptic text—one that is laying out its theology, future goals, and how they plan to go about fulfilling them—I find new analyses on a variety of actions conducted by the Islamic State to this point. In this way a deeper analysis is developed for what the Islamic State is saying, claiming, and fighting to achieve. This includes the desire to start a religious war across the world, attempts to purify the world from apostasy and disbelief, a strong distrust of Shi’a Muslims, and an adamant attempt to separate the Islamic State from everyone else by way of use of Shari’a Law. These ideas all center on, I argue, the A’maq Cycle and its details regarding the battles against Christians, a global fitna, and the eventual return of Jesus who will kill the Dajjal and [re]establish God’s Law across the world.

What is known of ISIS’s apocalyptic narrative, so far, is to be found exclusively from *Al-Hayat Media Center, A’maq Media*, and its online magazine *Dabiq* (now in its 14th issue)—which will be the crux of this chapter’s analysis.\(^{304}\) While Twitter has been one of the leading contributors for ISIS recruitment online so far, it has recently become more difficult to trace any associated account to actual members of ISIS. After the original ISIS account was suspended in 2014 there has been a continued attempt to deter recruitment by blocking associated accounts.\(^{305}\) Therefore investigating official Twitter

\(^{304}\) The most recent addition came out at the end of this research and was not able to be analyzed fully.

\(^{305}\) Stern and Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, 164.
accounts of ISIS between 2015 and 2016 has become nearly impossible.

For example, after the release of James Foley’s video Twitter began to double its efforts of suspending associated accounts.\(^{306}\) In the months that ensued, additional efforts were spent resulting in thousands more being shut down. The effort of taking down ISIS supporters on Twitter has to this point only been semi-effective, due largely to how ISIS continuously evolves through a “whack-a-mole” strategy. In this way, every account “whacked” two or more sprout up in its place.\(^ {307}\) The benefit of this strategy has proved effective for ISIS keeping on-line support, but consequently also resulted in its most authentic and authoritative accounts losing thousands of followers each time it is shut down.

This has led to ISIS supporters to enter into a virtual diaspora where there no longer existed an official ISIS Twitter account to speak on behalf of the Islamic State. Lacking this overarching authority, a mass amount of accounts has begun claiming to be the official spokesperson of the Islamic State. This has left scholars with no real ability to decipher between those were legitimately associated with ISIS and those that are not. For this reason, this chapter’s attention will focus entirely on publications officially released from Islamic State media, specifically the thirteen issues of *Dabiq*.

An early clue that points to the existence of an apocalyptic narrative is the very name the Islamic State chose for its on-line magazine—*Dabiq*. The reason behind the name is directly linked to an apocalyptic hadith that was birthed from the A’maq Cycle.\(^ {308}\) In issue 3 *The Call to Hijrah* the Islamic State elaborates upon the reasoning behind this

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306 Ibid., 169.
307 Ibid., 136.
308 “Abu Hurayrah reported that Allah’s messenger said, ‘The Hour will not be established until the Romans land at al-A’maq or Dabiq.’”
choice of name, “As mentioned in the introduction of our first issue, the name of our magazine was taken from the area named Dabiq in the northern countryside of Halab, due to the significant role it will play during the events of *al-Malhamah al-Kubra* (The Grand Battle) against the crusaders…We ask Allah to place us in the camp of believers on the day of *al-Malhamah* and keep us firm until he grants us victory or martyrdom.”

Here the Islamic State remarks that the name Dabiq was specifically taken because of the role the region is to have during the “events of *al-Malhamah al-Kubra.*” This notion was further elaborated upon during the execution video of Peter Kassig where, while Kassig’s head laid at the feet of “Jihadi John,” reference was made to Dabiq. In another direct message to President Obama, Emwazi quotes Zaqarwi’s apocalyptic statement (found at the front of every *Dabiq* issue), “The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify—by Allah’s permission—until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq” before concluding with his own threat “And here we are burying the first American crusader in Dabiq, eagerly awaiting the remainder of your armies to arrive.”

The perceived fascination with Dabiq’s apocalyptic role and the adoption of the name for its magazine shows that the Islamic State is constructing its end time narrative around Cook’s A’maq Cycle. Being influenced by this particular cycle has provided the Islamic State with a narrative full of clashes against Christians, other Muslims, Jews, and eventually against the Dajjal prior to the appearance of Jesus.

In Issue 1 *The Return of the Khalifah*, a slightly altered version to the classical narrative is placed at the end of the magazine to provide readers with purpose for combatting the West (Christians):

> Abu Hurayrah reported that Allah’s messenger said, ‘The Hour will not be

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309 *Dabiq* 3:15
established until the Romans land at al-A’maq or Dabiq. Then an army from al-Madinah [the city of Medina] 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. The 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. Then they will conquer Constantinople. Whole they are dividing the war booty, having hung their swords on olive trees, Shaytan [Satan] will shout, ‘The false Messiah [the Dajjal] has followed after your families who were left behind.’ So they will leave for their families, but Shaytan’s claim is false. When they arrive to Sham he comes out. Then while they are preparing for battle and filing their ranks, the prayer is called. So ‘Isa Ibn Maryam [Jesus] will descend and lead them. When the enemy of Allah sees him, he will melt until he perished, but he kills him with his own hand, and then shows them his blood upon his spear. [Sahih Muslim.]

The area of Dabiq plays a vital role in the Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative, and its adopted name to the magazine helps position the Islamic State as being aware of the classic sources and possibly being inspired by them. This is not limited to Dabiq, and was on the minds of the soldiers who fought for control of the region in 2014. McCants notes that when the town of Dabiq was taken by ISIS soldiers on a hill overlooking the area recorded themselves stating, “We are waiting for you in Dabiq. Try and come and we will kill every single solider” while another is heard claiming, “Thirty states remain to complete the number of eighty flags that will gather in Dabiq and begin the Battle.” It would seem that the soldiers who fought for control of Dabiq were quite aware of the

310 Dabiq 1
311 McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse 104.

Dabiq 4 makes a citation of the hadith the soldier was reference to at the end of the issue:

“Allah’s Messenger said, ‘You will have a treaty of security with the Romans until you both fight an enemy beyond them. And you will be victorious, you will gain war booty, and you will achieve such without losses. Thereafter you will return until you lodge at a pastureland full of rocky mounds. A man from the Roman Christians will then raise the cross. He will say, ‘The cross has prevailed!’ A man from the Muslims will then say, ‘Rather Allah has prevailed,’ and then he will angrily rise and crush the cross which is not at a distance from him. Then the Romans will betray the treaty by rising against the breaker of the cross and striking his neck. The Muslims will then rise and rush to their arms. They will then battle. Allah will bless this party of Muslims with shahadah. The Romans will say to the Roman leader, ‘We are sufficient for you against the Arabs.’ They will gather for the Malhamah (the grand battle before the Hour). They will come for you under eighty banners, with each banner there will be twelve thousand people.”
implications of the victory in the wider apocalyptic narrative.

The Islamic State does, as some argue, record these types of videos in order to solidify its claim of being a functioning state rather than as evidence for its belief in the apocalypse. Yet even when doing this, the Islamic State continues to emphasize Dabiq’s apocalyptic role in the battles to come against the Romans (Americans). Strategies of showing its location would seem to be catastrophic for a group of Islamist militants trying to expand its controlled boundaries and influence throughout the region, but ISIS continues to openly provide such information. The region of Dabiq plays a significant role in the A’maq Cycle and is where the Romans are prophesized to appear prior to the Final Hour. This strategy may very well be the result of believing if American soldiers were to show up, the prophesized battles would commence. By taking a closer look at the narrative being constructed in Dabiq, I argue that there are fresh insights and interpretations, like this, for understanding future aspirations and agendas of the Islamic State.

In order to fully understand the Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative, I conducted my research on the 13 issues of Dabiq and viewed them as being the apocalyptic text of the Islamic State. I approached all thirteen issues as though they reflect the beliefs of the Islamic State, by doing so found apocalyptic rhetoric is in each and every issue. Throughout the thirteen issues I found references to the Dajjal 35 times, fitna 20 times, Mahdi 13 times (9 being referred to the Jewish Mahdi who is also depicted as the Dajjal), the “Hour” 29 times, the battles of al-Malhamah 18 times, and the return of Isa (Jesus) 11 times.

\[312\] Dabiq is the on-line magazine released by the Islamic State. It began in 2014 and typically is released on a monthly basis, though this is not always the case. It is separated into a variety of different topics and sections, and can be anywhere from 30 to 80 pages in length.
This rhetoric points toward *Dabiq* being an apocalyptic text—one that lays out how the Islamic State views itself, society, the Islamic tradition as a whole, and its actions in accordance to fulfilling prophecy. The way that ISIS frames its narrative in *Dabiq* sheds additional light onto ISIS’s view of the world being “a failure” and in need of change and purification. In this way it is not always *what* is being said but often *how* ISIS is portraying the message that points in the direction of *Dabiq* being an apocalyptic text. Much like how scholars today have been able to analyze historic apocalyptic texts and discover new insight, the same can be done now with *Dabiq*.

By analyzing *Dabiq* in such a way, I find evidence that the Islamic State has not only constructing an apocalyptic narrative but is also using it in order to justify its actions, style of governing, and possibly boost recruitment appeal across the world. With influence stemming from the A’maq Cycle, ISIS understands its role in history according to what is foretold in the classic narrative. A narrative that, again, is flooded with mentions of *fitna*, war against Christians, immorality, the appearance of the Dajjal, and the return of Jesus. Without taking the Islamic State’s apocalyptic nature seriously, however, this analysis of the group’s possible motivations and future aspirations are inherently ignored. By understanding *Dabiq* as apocalyptic literature, I demonstrate that ISIS has strategically used the A’maq Cycle to claim lay out the vision of the future, justify its claim to be the Final Muslims that will fight the Christian armies, and as well as validation for any violent action conducted as being needed to fulfill prophecy.

Viewing the Islamic State in this way may also provide an addition perspective for why the group has sustained global appeal despite its violent nature. Again recall that Cook claims for apocalyptic authors, “The very adoption of a worldview that leads to a
messianic future implies that the present system is at least partially a failure.”\textsuperscript{313} The Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative, in this way, is not just certainty that end of the world is coming. Rather it may also be a direct window for how such violent movement was able to form and attract such a significant number of foreign recruits so quickly. In this way, viewing \textit{Dabiq} as apocalyptic literature provides two angles of analysis. The first is that \textit{Dabiq} can provide insight into the reasons for why ISIS is conducting certain actions, and possibly may provide awareness for future activities. The second benefit from understanding \textit{Dabiq} as apocalyptic literature, as the previous chapters have shown, is that it may provide new understandings to the social, political, and theological issues facing the Islamic tradition and/or the Middle East.

As previously shown, apocalyptic literature tends to arise within the Islamic tradition during periods of high levels of anxiety and perceived religious persecution amongst a Muslim community. The propaganda released by ISIS today may also illustrate a similar undertone, but now with thousands of supporters around the world possessing similar feelings of political oppression, religious persecution, and/or a fear that the Muslim identity was under attack in a modernizing world. This development may have forced individuals to believe that the only way to have their voices heard in what seems to be a secularizing world is through violent insurgency—one that believes it is fulfilling prophecy prior to the Final Hour.

Problems with Dismissing Religious Motivations

When ISIS caught the attention of the world in late 2014 with the publicized execution of James Foley, there began to be deliberate efforts to combat the Islamic State in a

\textsuperscript{313} Cook, \textit{Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic}, 312.
number of ways. This included attempts to halt migrations to Islamic State territory, censor ISIS propaganda online, and attempts to de-legitimize the group theologically by claiming that the group is not really “Islamic.”314 The latter approach has become one of the leading strategies so far. As discussed in the introduction, Jack Jenkins claims Graeme Wood’s assessment of ISIS’s apocalyptic nature had “fallen prey to an inaccurate trope all too common in many Western circles: that ISIS is an inevitable product of Islam.” Yet I demonstrate, as Wood did previously, the Islamic State is framing its end time narrative through an interpretation of classic Islamic sources—specifically in line with the details of the A’maq Cycle. The attempt to disassociate ISIS from any facet of the Islamic tradition, however, may only be playing right into its apocalyptic narrative and understanding of themselves.

Theological attacks against the group are being re-directed in Dabiq as support to its narrative. Dabiq constantly reinforces itself in a particular manner, one that attempts to frame the Islamic State as the last pious believers who are being persecuted for its religious beliefs. For example In Issue 7 From Hypocrisy to Apostasy: Extinction of the Grayzone, the Islamic State directly addresses justifies its choice of burning Jordanian pilot Moath al-Kasasbeh to death. The Islamic State came under fire from a barrage of theological attacks against the action from Muslim citizens, Islamic scholars, and government officials alike. ISIS, however, points to a classic source and then defends its action of killing a Muslim man as “retribution for his crimes against Islam and the Muslims, including his active involvement in crusader airstrikes against Muslim

314 Refer back to the recent debate on the publication of What ISIS Really Wants and the pushback it received by wanting to make claim that ISIS was “very Islamic.”
lands.” In this way, the Islamic State is claiming that the man’s execution was justified by scripture and justified because he was attacking the Islamic State.

Further debating the matter, Dabiq clarifies the reasoning behind its choice of execution and why it only appears to the majority of the world as being “un-Islamic:”

This type of rhetoric is typical of hizbiyyah (those contradicting the example of Muhammad)—even those masquerading as supporters of the mujahidin (those engaged in jihad)—who continue to live under the authority of the murtaddin (apostate) puppets, and defeatist Muslims who reside in the lands of kufr (nonbelief) under the authority of the crusaders themselves...Such people have had their religion diluted and, not surprisingly, are always amongst the first to speak out in any case where the mujahidin display their harshness towards the crusaders, attempting to disguise their criticism towards the mujahidin as concern for the image of Islam.

According to ISIS, the outcry which arose against it did not occur because the action went against classic Islamic sources. Rather the outcry was a result of the rest of the Muslim world being removed from the “true” interpretation of Shari’a Law. The Islamic State is also quick to attack politicians and Western leaders as being the reason for why the Muslim world no longer recognizes such actions as being in accordance with the tradition:

And yet, as politicians and leaders, they have the platform to spread their opinions and influence millions of others. It’s the same rubbish we hear from Obama, Hollande, Netanyahu, and the others time and again, the old “the Islamic State is not Islamic” diatribe. How Islam is great, we really like Muslims, but only “Muslims” who conform to our definition of what a “Muslim” should be, who fits neatly into the definition of a working democracy. And whoever does no conform to this new definition of “Muslim” will be persecuted.

The Islamic State projects attacks against it as further evidence that they are being attacked because of faith not because of politics or nationalism. This uses this strategy to

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315 Dabiq 7:5
316 Dabiq 7
317 Dabiq 7:78
stir and manifest a religious war across the globe between believer and non-believer. ISIS contends, in this argument, that the Western world has created an archetype for what a “Muslim” should be defined as, how they should believe, and how they should not take Islamic sources in their literal context. The Islamic State’s narrative, however, is assembled around a claim of being against such a Western archetype of what Islam entails. Another example found in Issue 13 *The Rafidah From Ibn Saba’ To The Dajjal*, frames the caliphate as being where the “true” Muslim can safely reside:

Come forth to strengthen and unify the ranks of the Muslims. Come forth to support Allah’s religion revealed from above the seven heavens. Come forth to aid the Khilafah [Caliphate] upon the prophetic methodology…The misleading deviant “scholars” even left their corrupt fatawa [decree] that had been directed against the fight kuffar [nonbeliever] who wage war against the religion and its noble methodology and instead directed the attention of their disgraceful fatawa towards those who are establishing Islam and elevating the tower of Khilafah.\(^{318}\)

In this way, as we will continue to see, the Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative is fueled around the belief that it is made up of the final “true” and “pious” Muslims foretold to appear prior to the Hour. Theological attacks against ISIS are reflected, in *Dabiq*, as evidence that they are being attacked because of its religion—not its actions.

**Dabiq and Apocalyptic Hadiths**

Arguing the Islamic State is not “Islamic” brings no absolute understanding of the group’s motives or theological aspirations. Rather, such an approach avoids a major dynamic of the group’s identity and agenda—namely an apocalyptic nature and how it is influencing current and possibly future actions. The Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative is constructed to reflect nearly every attack against them, both in warfare and the media, as a way to legitimize its apocalyptic identity. As previously shown with the Siege of

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\(^{318}\) *Dabiq* 13:54
Mecca and the Sudanese Mahdi, a constant reinforcement of messianic belief strengthens the feeling of being “right” amongst members and allows for the Islamic State group to continuously tap into this belief as a source of inspiration—despite victory or defeat.

The first major reference to the Islamic State’s apocalyptic nature is found at the end of every issue of *Dabiq* where an apocalyptic hadith is strategically placed. Typically, I discovered, this apocalyptic hadith would be the thesis of the particular issue—a way to help support what the previous fifty to eighty pages had been discussing. Through this method, unlike the authors of the late 20th century and early 21st century, *Dabiq* attempted to provide its baseline understanding of the apocalypse entirely from classic literatures. As we saw in Chapter Two, modern authors began incorporating a slew of non-traditional sources to make sense between current events and the end of the world. Though *Dabiq* does speculate about the past and what many would call conspiracies, such as in Issue 2 *The Flood*, the magazine remains relatively dependent on the classic hadiths to provide initial support for its claims.

For example when discussing the attacks of 9/11, *Dabiq* argues that the attacks were not the work of President Bush and the American government like the modern novels did. Rather *Dabiq* claims that such a plot would have been impossible to maneuver and that it was done because of God’s decree and the “blessed” work of Osama Bin Laden. Issue 9 *They Plot and Allah Plots* states, “If jihad operations—like those of September 11th—were carried out against the kuffar (nonbelievers), they would claim these operations were conspiracies by the kuffar to justify their aggression against Muslims. And so, according to these theorists, almost all the events of the world were somehow linked back to the kuffar, their intelligence agencies, research, technology, and coconspirators!
Conspiracy theories have thereby become an excuse to abandon jihad, to have great awe for the kuffar (nonbelievers).” In this way, in complete opposite fashion of the modern novels, Dabiq argues that they rise of conspiracies around 9/11 were invented by the West in order to take away influence and legitimacy from Bin Laden.

Later on in the issue Dabiq further discusses the 9/11 attacks and now frames it in an apocalyptic context. Dabiq states, “There is a summary of this final plot of the crusaders and their apostate allies before the major malhamah. First, the crusaders have become too weak to wage their own wars. This is due to the blessed operations of September 11\textsuperscript{th} and the subsequent jihad in both Afghanistan and Iraq. They are too weak financially, militarily, and psychologically to fight another war, although there is no doubt that they will eventually fight the Muslims at Dabiq after the crusaders’ betrayal of an impending truce.”

In this manner Dabiq avoids plunging into the same conspiracies that plagued the modern authors decades prior. Yet this does not mean that the end of the world is not at the forefront of ISIS’s thought, or that there are ideas within Dabiq do not expand beyond the realm of reality. The theme of Issue 2 deals, for example, specifically deals with the argument that humanity no longer has a “free” choice in refusing to obey God’s laws. This becomes ever more important to Dabiq’s argument of the Final Hour approaching. In this issue the caliphate, rather than Noah’s Ark, is depicted as both prophetic in nature and a safe zone for believers prior to the Flood (now understood as the Final Hour). In this narrative, according to Dabiq, humanity has been led to believe that they should have the choice to remove themselves away from God’s laws and not suffer the divine

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{319} Dabiq 9:15 \textsuperscript{320} Dabiq 9:57}
consequences. In this way, the Islamic State is “justified” for establishing the caliphate, instituting Shari’a Law, and conducting violence against any that oppose its rule. *Dabiq* claims:

> From amongst the polluted ideologies that have afflicted people the entire world over throughout the course of the tyranny, carried out by the forces of *kufr* [nonbelief], is the notion that the people can choose whether to follow the truth or to embark upon falsehood. This ideology teaches that no one has the right, regardless of whom he may be, to impose any creed or set of morals on anyone else even if that creed or set of morals is the truth revealed by Allah…The proponents of this ideology have portrayed the prophets of Allah incorrectly, making them out to be more akin to preachers and guides who have no authority over the masses at all…The *da'wah* [preaching] of Prophet Nuh [Noah] followed a policy from the very beginning that was completely opposed to the methodology of choice. In fact, it was characterized in contrast to this by a frank, early warning of the consequence of deviation and opposition to the truth.321

In this frame the caliphate, much like the Flood in Noah’s time, cannot be stopped since it is a piece of God’s divine plan to bring people back to the submission of the Islamic tradition. The “free” choice that exists in the world today is understood to be a result from refusing to adhere to the laws of God. In much the same way that the Flood could not be stopped during the life of Noah, Issue 2 constantly is retelling the argument that humanity can no longer stop this caliphate from thriving and spreading across the world nor the approaching Final Hour. In this line of thought, the final page of the magazine concludes with an apocalyptic hadith reading, “Allah’s Messenger said, ‘You will invade the Arabian Peninsula and Allah will enable you to conquer it. You will invade Persia, and Allah will enable you to conquer it. You will then invade Rome, and Allah will enable you to conquer it. Then you will fight the Dajjal, and Allah will enable you to conquer him.’ [Sahih Muslim].”

*Dabiq* makes clear citation to the classic text of Sahih Muslim’s hadith collection and

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321 *Dabiq* 2:4-5

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uses it as a source of authority for the magazine. At the same time they portray the caliphate as an unstoppable movement, like the Flood, and it will achieve victory against Persia (Iran/Shi’a Muslims), Rome (Christians), and the Dajjal (Satan/immorality/injustice). Similar to how modern apocalyptic authors attempted to interlace classic sources with current events, the Islamic State also attempts to do the same but does so in a slightly different manner. By avoiding tapping into non-traditional sources, the Islamic State is sure to base its narrative solely around what can be found in classic Islamic texts—mainly the Qur’an and Hadith collections. Rather than attempt to link every part of a hadith to current events, Dabiq instead places the classic sources at the end of each issue in order to encompass the entire magazine’s discussion of topics—a tactic that is used to lead readers to make the connections between the two.

Another example of this can be found in Issue 6 titled Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan. In this issue there is an emphasis on the theological differences between ISIS and other contemporary jihadist movements. These differences, according to ISIS, demonstrate its legitimacy as being the most pious and observant Muslims. This argument is expanded upon throughout Issue 6 where Dabiq claims that the Islamic State is the true caliphate because of its “sincere” dedication to Shari’a Law rather than secular law. Alongside this assertion, is also an overt hostility against current Muslim leaders, Islamist rebel armies, and clerics across the world—all of which ISIS deems responsible for the current failing state of the Islamic tradition. This further supports how ISIS attempts to separate itself from other Islamist movements by reason that they are the final and only Muslims who will combat the Dajjal and Christian forces prior to the Hour. Dabiq states, “Anas

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322 Dabiq 3:31 “Jihad not only grants life on the larger scale of the Ummah, it also grants a fuller life on the scale of the individual…The life of jihad is not possible until you pack and move to the Khilafah.”
Ibn Malik narrated that Rasulullah said, ‘Prior to the Dajjal there will be deceptive years in which the truthful person is belied, the liar is believed, the trustworthy is accused of treachery, the treacherous person is trusted, and the ruwaybidah (corrupter) speaks.’

[Hasan: Reported by Imam Ahmad and others].”

Another example of using a classic hadith comes from Issue 8 titled Shariah Alone will Rule Africa. Here the overall synopsis of the magazine is to argue against the implementation of nationalism and Western styles of government, especially in North Africa. A major point of emphasis is that the caliphate, again, is the only place ruling by God’s Law. For ISIS this should be the only way of governing. A major part of the Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative is the notion that it is separating itself from the rest of the world, prior to the Hour, by sticking as closely as possible to the classic understandings of the tradition. For ISIS, there can be no other way of living or governing. As a result of this belief properly using Shari’a Law is a priority—despite the backlash and persecution received because of implementing it. ISIS references a hadith stating:

Abdullah Ibn Hawalah said, “Allah’s Messenger said, ‘You will be granted conquest over Sham, Rome, and Persia, until one of you will possess such and such number of camels, such and such number of cows, and such and such number of sheep, to the extent if one were to be given a hundred dinars, he would be discontent with it.’ He then placed his hand on my head and said, ‘O Ibn Hawalah, if you see that the Khilafah has come to the Holy Land [Sham], then the earthquakes, tribulations, and great matters have approached. The Hour will be closer that day to the people than this hand of mine from your head’ [Sahih: Reported by Imam Ahmad, Abu Dawudd, and al- Hakim].

Here the Islamic State attempts to lead the reader to the conclusion that since the implement Shari’a Law in Syria and Iraq is a sign that the caliphate has appeared prior

323 Dabiq 7
the Hour. In this manner, ISIS is attempting to fulfill prophecy and is pointing to the apocalyptic hadiths as evidence that such is occurring. Another example of such can be found in Issue 3 A Call to Hijrah. Here Dabiq argues (much the same way as Noah’s Flood in Issue 2) that every “true” believer must migrate to Islamic State territory prior to the Final Hour. An action framed as being similar to what the early Muslim community did when migrating to Medina to flee the persecution received in Mecca. The issue concludes:

Abdullah Ibn Amr said that Allah’s Messenger said, ‘There will be Hijrah (migration) after Hijrah. The best people on earth will be those who keep to the land of Ibrahim’s Hijrah. Then there will remain on the earth the worst of its people. Their lands will cast them out, Allah will hate them, and the fire with gather them together with the apes and swine. [Hasan—Reported by Imam Ahmad, Abu Dawud, and al-Hakim]” while also providing an additional commentary “And what a tremendous favor it is from Allah to guide one to the Islamic State and grant him companionship with…those who plunge into the malahim (the great battles prior to the Hour)!  

In this way the Islamic State is attempting to claim that migration is the most important act for a believer living in an area where they are persecuted. ISIS also adds its own interpretation to the hadith by stating that today the migration to its territory results in “companionship with…those who plunge into the malahim” prior to the Final Hour. Now knowing that the Islamic State is influenced by the A’maq Cycle, this is a clear reference to the final confrontation between Muslims and Christians prior to the appearance of Jesus and his killing of the Dajjal

Another example of an apocalyptic hadith used to support Dabiq’s narrative (influenced by the A’maq Cycle) is found in Issue 10 The Law of Allah or the Laws of Man. In this particular issue the argument is that the laws implemented across the world

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324 Dabiq 3
are a result of Western influence in Islamic societies. ISIS wants to, in this way, reiterate that it is conducting a religious war, not a political or nationalistic one. This is important to understand, in particular to how it is at the forefront of both the A’maq Cycle and *Dabiq*. At one point, within this issue, ISIS identifies the fighting against the Kurds is only occurring because of religious reasons, “Our war with the Kurds is a religious war. It is not a nationalistic war—we seek the refuge of Allah. We do not fight Kurds because they are Kurds. Rather we fight the *kuffar* (nonbelievers) amongst them, the allies of the crusaders and Jews in their war against the Muslims.”

Issue 10 attempts to further argue for the Islamic State’s “piety” and “legitimacy” by again arguing how it is “the only state ruling by Allah’s Shari’a today.” This will continue to be one of the leading claims throughout *Dabiq* and plays right into how the Islamic State understands the final battles being between believers and nonbelievers. By claiming this mantle and reasoning for why the caliphate was established the issue ends with yet another apocalyptic hadith:

Allah’s Messenger said, ‘Indeed, what I fear most for my Ummah (Muslim community) are the misguiding imams. And the Hour will not be established until tribes from my Ummah join the mushrikin (polytheist) and until tribes from my Ummah worship idols. And there will be in my Ummah thirty liars of who claim to be prophets. And I am the last of the prophets. There is no prophet after me. And there will always be a party of my Ummah manifest upon the truth not harmed by those who oppose them until there comes the command of Allah’ [Sahih: Reported by Abu Dawud, at-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Majah from Thawban].

In this way the Islamic State again attempts to appeal to its readers as being the Muslims who will stand up and fight for establishing belief amongst a world that has fallen away from what the Islamic tradition entails. I use these examples to highlight how

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325 *Dabiq* 10: 34
326 *Dabiq* 10: 4
every issue of *Dabiq* ends with an apocalyptic hadith, and how *Dabiq* uses these classic
apocalyptic texts to justify what they are doing in present time as a fulfillment of
prophecy or in order to separate believers from nonbelievers. Rather than include the
hadith early on in the writing or repeatedly reference it throughout, *Dabiq* places such
references at the end of the magazine. I find this is a strategy which attempts to avoid any
discrepancies arising between the context of a hadith and a current event. As we saw in
chapter two, the attempt to connect every current event to a classic hadith eventually
resulted in the desire to look at non-traditional sources. By refraining from this tactic,
*Dabiq* instead places the hadith at the end and allows for the rest of the issue to be
constructed solely around particular events.

At times, the apocalyptic rhetoric within *Dabiq* does become less obvious and more
difficult to uncover—but this only happens without a solid foundation on the apocalyptic
texts that are cited. On occasion there are only subtle references made between current
events and the Final Hour. For example, in Issue 12 *Just Terror* the Islamic State
references the classic Euphrates River hadith without providing any real indication of the
issue in the pages prior. This particular issue concludes with,

Allah’s Messenger said, ‘The Euphrates is on the verge of uncovering a mountain
of gold. He who is present there should not take anything from it’ [Reported by
al-Bukhari and Muslim from Abu Hurayrah]. In another narration he said, ‘The
Hour will not be established until the Euphrates uncovers a mountain of gold over
which the people will fight. Ninety-nine out of each one hundred will be killed,
but every man amongst them will say, ‘Perhaps I myself will survive’ [Reported
by Muslim from Abu Hurayrah].

While the hadith mentioned above discusses the Hour’s establishment after a mountain
of gold is discovered, there oddly remains no other mention of oil, gold, or the Euphrates
elsewhere in the Issue. As discussed in the chapter Two, this classic narrative only gained
popularity during the late 20th century due to the wealth oil brought to the Middle East. Prior to this point in history, the Euphrates narrative enjoyed little attractiveness. The inclusion of it in Dabiq, however, may point to the influence modern literatures had on the region during the last two decades. Recall Muhammad Isa Dawud’s 2002 The Treasure of the Euphrates in which he used the same hadith to conclude “Such is the secret, O nation of Islam: after having detected the Euphrates’ mountain of gold, America decided to invade Iraq and to change its regime.” It would be after the American invasion in 2003 that this hadith would become widespread in the countless other modern apocalyptic fictional novels being written.

Yet rather than construct the entire issue on this specific hadith, as Dawud had done in 2002, Dabiq carefully and consciously places the narrative in the back of the Issue. This is done in hope of allowing readers to draw their own connections between what they had just read and the details of the apocalyptic hadith. While these endings in every issue are a beginning point for finding that ISIS may be apocalyptically inspired, I found that it was beyond these hadith excerpts that the bulk of its apocalyptic speculation thrived. In light of this, this chapter will conclude by focusing on a number of topics discussed in Dabiq that have association to the A’maq Cycle. By locating and analyzing topics such as—the use of Shari’a Law, the role “strangers”, the purpose of fitna, the extinction of the grayzone, the return of Jesus, and the Dajjal’s identity—we are able to achieve a deeper analysis for how ISIS is using apocalyptic belief construct a narrative that advocates violence against any group that opposes them.

Recruitment and Apocalyptic Appeal

327 Apocalypse in Islam 118
One of the more peculiar aspects of ISIS has been its ability to draw in recruits from across the Middle East, North Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America—despite portraying high levels of violence and destruction to the public. A 2014 C.I.A report found that there were a minimum of 15,000 foreign fighters who had migrated to ISIS territory, including roughly 2,000 coming from western nations. These foreign recruits have traveled from all over the world to join the Islamic State and the fighting taking place across Iraq and Syria despite having no actual ties to the region. While these recruits may have come for any number of reasons, Dabiq’s apocalyptic rhetoric may help further explain why the Islamic State has been so successful in its recruitment of foreigners—who ISIS refers to as the “Strangers.”

The Islamic State’s narrative encompasses a wide range of topics—from the Dajjal and Jesus to slavery and Shari’a Law—but stresses that these topics all have apocalyptic implications and roles to play in fulfilling prophecy. The Islamic State, in this way, has been able to reap two major benefits in its narrative; time because it becomes “unbelievably short” and meaning because it suddenly is “to be found in everything” conducted. By formulating Dabiq around these themes, the Islamic State positioned itself at a unique moment in Islamic history—a time filled with war, fitnah, and an increase of worldwide apostasy that needs being purified prior to the Day of Judgment. By arguing that a variety of actions are to take place at this moment in Islamic history to separate believers from unbelievers, which it claims is being accomplished, the Islamic State has been quite successful in reaching a global audience through its apocalyptic narrative.

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328 http://time.com/3340662/cia-isis-isil/
329 Cook, Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature, 3.
Dabiq helps contextualize a variety of topics that have become major selling points for ISIS’s apocalyptic appeal. I will highlight how these topics, to this point, been possibly misinterpreted due to the denial of its apocalyptic origins. By pointing out how these topics are rooted in apocalyptic speculation or are strategies of fulfilling prophecy, I argue Dabiq is an apocalyptic literature now being used to justify every action of the Islamic State. One of the first major points to support this claim is the appeal for recruits to be a part of what is framed as being the “Strangers” and how the role plays into apocalyptic expectations of what will occur prior to the Day of Judgement.

Who are the Strangers?

Those who break off from their tribes: “Ibn Mas’ud said that the Prophet said, ‘Verily Islam began as something strange, and it will return to something strange as it first began, so glad tidings to the strangers.’ Someone asked, ‘Who are the strangers?’ He said, ‘Those who break off from their tribes’ [Reported by Imam QAhd, ad-Darimi, and Ibn Majah, with a Sahih isnad].

Issue 3 of Dabiq, where the hadith above is referenced, the issue begins with a section titled “The Islamic State before al-Malhamah (the immigrants to the land of Malahim).” This heading helps position the role of “strangers” into the Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative as being a part of the al-Malhamah or grand battle. In the opening pages additional clarification is made for the importance strangers will play in the things to come, “I have no doubt that this state, which has gathered the bulk of the muhajirun [those performing jihad] in Sham and has become the largest collection of muhajirun in the world, is a marvel of history that has only come about to pave the way for al-

330 Dabiq 3:4
Malhamah al-Kubra (the grand battle prior to the Hour).”

Dabiq places the role of the Strangers under the umbrella of the al-Malhamah—a clear reference to its apocalyptic nature and view of the world. In this argument is the notion that since the Islamic tradition formed as something “strange” or “foreign” amongst the pagan tribes of Mecca during the life of the Prophet Muhammad, so it would return to something strange and unknown to the world prior to the Final Hour. Such an indication is that only a few people would be truly aware of what the Islamic tradition entails and how it should be conducted. In tune with the previous argument of being the only place where Shari’a Law is being conducted properly, Dabiq’s understanding of the Strangers is that this is only because of how far away the world has fallen away from the basis of what the Islamic tradition once was. That it had become gradually diluted since the death of the Prophet Muhammad until now being at the state currently existing. Dabiq continues to cite yet another hadith in hope of further arguing that the version of Islam being practice today is far removed from how it was practiced during the life of the Prophet Muhammad and early Muslim community:

Thus, those who responded to the da’wah (preaching) of Islam left their tribes...therefore, they were strangers, in reality, until Islam had emerged, its da’wah had spread, and the people entered into it in multitudes, such that they were no longer strangers. Then it began to part and fade, until it returned as something strange as it first began...For the real Islam is extremely strange, and its adherents are the strangest of strangers amongst the people” [Madarijus-Salikin].

The Islamic State uses this line of thinking as generating wider appeal for its message and caliphate’s legitimacy—especially towards Muslims living in Western nations. In Issue 12 Just Terror, Dabiq appeals to Western Muslims who may feel as though they

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331 Dabiq 3:6
332 Dabiq 3: 8
have become a “Stranger” in the land that are living and practicing their religion:

Strangeness is a condition that the Muslim living in the West cannot escape as long as he remains amongst the crusaders. He is a stranger amongst Christians and liberals. He is a stranger amongst fornicators and sodomites. He is a stranger amongst drunkards and druggies. He is a stranger in his faith and deeds, as his sincerity and submission is towards Allah alone, whereas the kuffar (nonbeliever) of the West worship and obey clergy, legislatures, media, and both their animalistic and deviant desires... Thus, the Muslim in the West is in a constant struggle. His fitrah is at war with the deviant drifts of the kuffar surrounding him. The battle to preserve his fitrah and faith knows no ceasefire. If he wants to preserve what mustard seed of faith he has been blessed with, he must exhaust himself to the utmost so as to remain just a Muslim, never mind a Muslim striving for jihad.333

For the Islamic State, “Strangers” in the West have become strange because they are unable to practice their faith in how they want to or are persecute for attempting to do.334 They may be under the impression they are being oppressed for their religious identity. This bleeds into how Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative continuously claims that its territory remains the only “safe” province for Muslims to practice Shari’a Law. Dabiq continues this line of appealing to foreign recruits by stating, “The Khilafah [Caliphate] was revived, and muhajirun [those who participate in jihad] were now pouring into Sham from all corners of the Earth at a rate much greater than ever before. One no longer felt the strangeness he would experience in the lands of crusaders nor that in the lands of disbelief or in that in the territories of the nationalist factions. He now had his own land, where his creed and methodology of Islam.”335

The Islamic State, through Dabiq, appeals to foreign recruits from across the world (especially in the West) by claiming that the inherent strangeness toward the Islamic

333 Dabiq 12:29-30
334 This particularly is emphasized in Dabiq as being those who wish to conduct jihad or live under strict interpretations of Shari’a Law. The attempt of Dabiq is to show that such aspirations from Muslims are now only possible under the leadership of the caliphate.
335 Dabiq 12:29-30
tradition is actually a sign that the Final Hour is at hand. The Islamic State understands itself as fulfilling prophecy by bringing awareness to how the strangeness is once again appearing. They prop up the caliphate as being the place where persecuted Muslims from across the world will no longer feel troubled for their religious desires.

It is, however, important to note that use of the term “Stranger” amongst jihadists groups has been historically used, including al- Zarqawi who gave himself the title of “the Stranger” when arriving in Afghanistan in 1989.336 While the use of the term is nothing new for the Islamic State, the way that they are framing it around apocalyptic connotations is. William McCants notes that one soldier publically claimed when arriving in Syria, “If you think all these mujahedeen 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” while another member declared “They are here because this is what the Prophet said and promised, the Grand battle is happening.”337

Both of these members view the arrival of mass amounts of foreign recruits as being a Sign that the final battles were about to occur. This is only further enriched with the region of Syria [Sham] being the place that these battles were prophesized to take place according to classical sources—including the A’maq Cycle. It is not just the soldiers, however, making the connection between the classic hadiths, ISIS, and the appearance of strangers in Iraq and Syria. Dabiq claims in Issue 12:

The severe strangeness has been lifted. The only strangeness to confront was that of the crusader alliance, the Shi’a alliance, and the Arab alliance. But this strangeness was welcome…O Allah, what comes to us of good is from You alone; You have no partner; To You is due all praise and thanks. O Allah, preserve the great blessing of the Khilafah for us until Prophet Isa [Jesus] descends to lead us.

337 Ibid., 101.
O Allah, make us Your thankful slaves.\textsuperscript{338}

Here there is a direct connection made between three major factors; the removal of strangeness in the world, the establishment of the caliphate that Muslims can migrate to, and the return of Jesus. With discussion of strangers and strangeness is constant reference of the caliphate being the only area where the strangeness will be lifted and that it will remain that way until the return of Jesus (\textit{Isa}). The additional implication of strangeness existing everywhere outside of the caliphate controlled areas is the belief that Muslims have no longer been able to properly conduct jihad and live by Shari’a Law due to the laws and regulations of nation-states across the world.

This appeal to Western recruits is further elaborated upon by how \textit{Dabiq} claims that mosques existing in the West have been corrupted by secularism and Western governments. In this way, \textit{Dabiq} attempts to highlight exactly why the “true” version of the Islamic tradition has become strange in the eyes of Western observers—including most Muslims. \textit{Dabiq} appeals by arguing “There are almost no masajid [mosque] in which one can seek shelter from heresy and belong to a community of strangers…He feels himself a stranger and is in constant search for a land in which he can practice his Islam more fully, especially if he hopes for jihad and is under the threat of crusader intelligence agencies persecuting him.”\textsuperscript{339}

Issue 3’s \textit{The Islamic State Before al-Malhamah} is then followed by another discussion of the statements provided above titled “Sham is the Land of Malahim.” Beginning with a number of hadiths and narrations arguing why Sham is the “blessed land with many of the events related to al-Mashi (Jesus)...and the Dajjal” \textit{Dabiq}

\textsuperscript{338} \textit{Dabiq} 12:39-40
\textsuperscript{339} \textit{Dabiq} 12: 39-40
concludes its argument by stating, “So those who left their tribes—the best of Allah’s slaves—rallied together…upon the path of Ibrahim [Abraham]. They fathered together in the land of malahim shortly before the occurrence of al-Malhamah al-Kubra, announce their enmity and hatred for the cross worshippers, the apostates, their crosses, their borders, and their ballot boxes, and pledged allegiance to the Khilafah, promising to die defending it.”

*Dabiq* continuously attempts to appeal to these recruits by arguing that the Islamic State is the only place in the world where Muslims can practice their faith without persecution and oppression. Also Dabiq attempts to position its narrative as being between the “cross worshippers” and Muslims—a direct reference to the A’maq Cycle which concludes with a final battle between the two. More importantly, the caliphate is depicted as the only legitimate place where jihad can be properly conducted. This is summarized in Issue 3 where they appeal to the consequences of not joining the Islamic State, “There is no life without Jihad, And there is no Jihad without Hijrah…Jihad not only grants life on the larger scale of the Ummah, it also grants a fuller life on the scale of the individual…The life of jihad is not possible until you pack and move to the Khilafah.”

**Shari’a Law and the Hour**

A major proponent of the Islamic States apocalyptic nature still remains its adamant use of Shari’a Law and how it is required to purify the religion prior to the Final Hour. Yet another strategy of both fulfilling prophecy and separating believer from

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340 *Dabiq* 3:11
341 *Dabiq* 3:31
nonbeliever—ally from enemy. The Islamic State’s Shari’a Law enforced brings with it a strict use of *Hudud* punishments (fixed penalties dictated by Islamic Law). These punishments include “beheading or crucifying bandits who kill people while robbing them; death by stoning for adultery; cutting off a hand or foot for theft; and flogging for fornication and adultery, drinking alcohol…[where] imposing the *hudud*, therefore, could burnish one’s ultraconservative credentials and bolster one’s claims to be a state.”

The Islamic State has, since 2007, attempted to apply these severe punishments in aspiration of becoming the most conservative “state” in the world, but such use nearly forced ISI to lose all support by doing so. This was largely due to lacking any control over a significant amount of territory between the years of 2007-2010. Recently, however, ISIS has once again have begun enforcing the *Hudud* as a way of showing piety and legitimacy to the claim of being the final group of Muslims prophesized to appear. With the establishment of the caliphate in 2014 the Islamic State has been able to use these punishments across its territory and have been no stranger in publically releasing its use of crucifixion, beheading, and other sorts of punishments. McCants does point out that the closest example to the Islamic State’s version of *hudud* is found in Saudi Arabia but that they still drastically differ. For one, ISIS views the Saudi Kingdom as illegitimate, run by apostates, and not completely abiding by the tenants of Shari’a Law. For example while the Islamic State publically displays its punishments, executions, and beheadings, the Saudi Kingdom tends to keep its punishments out of sight of foreign powers and does not publically broadcast punishments. This fear of foreign repercussions or media backlash comes as proof, to ISIS, which the Saudi Kingdom holds human values and laws over the mandates given to humanity from God. The Islamic State does

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not care about how the Western nations view them or condemn its actions—rather ISIS cares only about abiding by what Shari’a Law entails, and may explains why the Islamic State flaunts its execution of people by gunfire, crucifixion, or the tossing of homosexuals from rooftops.  

The Islamic State openly depicts such punishments to the entire world through its media outlets as another way of showing its attempt to follow as closely to Islamic Law as possible. *Dabiq* claims, “the Islamic State actively works to educate its citizens, preach and admonish them, enforce their strict adherence to Islamic obligations, judge their disputes, implement the Shari’a hudud, eradicate all traces of shirk and heresy, incite the people to jihad and call them to unite behind the Khalifah, Ibrahim Ibn Awwad Al-Husayani Al-Qurashi [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi].” The tenth issue titled *The Laws of Man or the Laws of Allah* further argues this point. *Dabiq* states:

The call to defend the Islamic State—the only state ruling by Allah’s Shari’ah today—continues to be answered by sincere Muslims and mujahidin [those performing jihad] around the world prepared to sacrifice their lives and everything dear to them to raise high the world of Allah and trample democracy and nationalism” and finishes their claim by requesting “Thus we renew our call to the sincere Muslims around the world to march forth and wage war against the crusaders and apostates who seek to wipe out the Shari’a.

The Islamic State portrays its punishments and executions for its reader so that they are shown the “sincerity” ISIS has in conducting Shari’a Law. In the same light, the Islamic State portrays its desire to use Shari’a Law as a way of identifying itself away from all enemies. With this mindset, the Islamic State claims that any attack against it (since it is the prophetic caliphate) is a declaration of nonbelief and thus justifiable to kill.

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343 Ibid., 137.
344 *Dabiq* 3:17
345 *Dabiq* 10:4
O you afflicted by *fitna* [strife], before embarking to fight the Islamic State, that there is no place on the face of the Earth where the Shari‘ah of Allah is implemented and the rule is entirely for Allah except for the lands of the Islamic State... Then ask yourself, “What is the ruling on someone who replaces or is a cause for the replacement of the law of Allah with the law of man?” Yes, you become a kafir because of that. So beware, for by fighting the Islamic State you fall into kufr whether you realize it or not.\(^\text{346}\)

In this manner the Islamic State positions its use of Shari‘a Law as being the decree from God and that anyone attacking ISIS is attempting to establish human laws instead. Here we see that the Islamic State is clearly framing its goals and ambitions in a religious context, and a religious war. This is important to note because it shows that the Islamic State, much like the quote on the Kurds previously, is attempting to portray actions as being belief vs. nonbelief. The apocalyptic addition to the framework provides the evidence and justification for conducting violence against those deemed as *kufr* or nonbelievers. The implement of Shari‘a Law is designed to function as a test for the individual, a test that can either result in one of two options—victory and belief or death and disbelief.

More recently the Islamic State has begun to interpret its use of Shari‘a Law a fulfillment of prophecy. In this manner its use of such strict interpretations of Shari‘a Law are actually perceived as fulfilling its apocalyptic narrative. Such was the case when the Islamic State began enslaving an ancient religious community in the Syrian mountains known as the Yazidis. In 2014 the Islamic State sieged a mountain range in Syria housing thousands of Yazidis and claimed that since the Yazidi’s were devil worshipers they were not a part of the protected religious communities mentioned in the Qur’an—due to the how the “Yazidis believe the devil was a fallen angel who eventually

\(^{346}\) *Dabiq* 10: 50
With this announcement coming from Islamic State ‘scholars,’ the Islamic State decided that the Yazidi women could now begin to be legally enslaved and distributed amongst ISIS soldiers as war booty. In Issue 4 of Dabiq under a section titled Revival of Slavery before the Hour, the Islamic State discussed and defended its reasoning behind such a decision. In wake of the capturing the region hosting the Yazidi community the Islamic State declared,

This large-scale enslavement of apostate families is probably the first since the abandonment of this Shari’ah law…The enslaved Yazidi families are now sold by the Islamic State soldiers as the mushrikin were sold by the Companions before them…Many of the apostate women and children are willingly accepted Islam and now race to practice it with evident sincerity after their exit from the darkness of shirk [apostasy]…After this discussion and as we approach al-Malhamah al-Kubra (the greatest battle before the Hour)—whenever its time comes by Allah’s decree—it is interesting to note that slavery has been mentioned as one of the signs of the Hour as well as one of the causes behind al-Malhamah al-Kubra. Rasulullah mentioned that one of the signs of the Hour was that ‘the slave girl gives birth to her master.’ This was reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayrah and by Muslim on the authority of Umar.³⁴⁸

Here the Islamic State openly declared that the legitimacy of its decision for initiating slavery came both from actions conducted by the Prophet Muhammad and as a clear sign that the end of the world was at hand. The Islamic State clarifies this decision stemmed from its interpretation of how the legalization of slavery is another step in fulfilling prophecy. It further argues that this is how Shari’a Law was “supposed to function” and that the end of slavery was only a result from humanity removing itself from the laws of God. Dabiq reads, “Again, it appears that those who drift away from the literal interpretation of slavery do so because it already existed and common in their era.

³⁴⁷ McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse, 112.
³⁴⁸ Dabiq 4:15
in such a manner that they found it hard to understand it as referring to actual slavery. But after the abandonment of slavery by Muslims and its subsequent revival, this literal interpretation becomes much more plausible.\textsuperscript{349}

It would appear, again, that the Islamic State has used the A’maq Cycle as further evidence of slavery being a sign of the Final Hour and a fulfilment of prophecy. According to the A’maq Cycle (and Dabiq), “the Romans say to the Muslims after the Romans have lined up the ranks near Dabiq, Leave us and those who were enslaved amongst us so we can fight them. The Muslims then respond, Nay, by Allah, we will not abandon our brothers to you.”\textsuperscript{350} Although only a slight mention, Dabiq points to this mention of there being slaves during the final confrontation with the Christians as evidence that slavery must be legalized prior to the Hour. ISIS unmistakably believes that by legalizing slavery it will further separate itself from other Islamist movements, and it will provide further legitimacy for fulfilling its apocalyptic narrative. In Issue 9 Dabiq elaborates upon the revitalization of slavery:

\textit{I write this whole the letters drip of pride. Yes, O religions of kufr [nonbelief] altogether, we have indeed raided and captured the kafir [nonbelieving] women, and drove them like sheep by the edge of the sword. And glory belongs to Allah, to His Messenger, and the believers, but the hypocrites do not know! Or did you and your supporters think we were joking on the day we announced the Khilafah upon the prophetic methodology? It is Khilafah with everything it contains of honor and pride for the Muslim and humiliation and degradation for the kafir. Our Prophet said, as narrated by Ibn Umar, ‘I was sent with the sword before the Hour so that Allah alone is worshipped without partners. And my provision was placed beneath the shade of my spear. And humiliation and degradation was made for those who oppose my command.’ Therefore, I further increase the spiteful ones in anger by saying that I and those with me at home prostrated to Allah in gratitude on the day the first slave-girl entered our home. Yes, we thanked our Lord for having let us live to the day we saw kufr [nonbelief] humiliated and its banner destroyed. Here we are today, and after centuries, reviving a prophetic Sunnah, which both the Arab and non-Arab enemies of Allah had buried. By Allah, we}

\textsuperscript{349} Dabiq 4:16
\textsuperscript{350} Dabiq 4:17
brought it back by the edge of the sword, and we did not do so through pacifism, negotiations, democracy, or elections. We established it according to the prophetic way, with blood-red swords, not with fingers for voting or tweeting.\textsuperscript{351}

In this manner, \textit{Dabiq} understands that that the use of Shari’a Law is a strategy of showing piety and legitimacy of the caliphate’s establishment. Actions, such as the legalization of slavery, are then interpreted as being the fulfillment of prophecy. \textit{Dabiq} continuously uses these notions to argue that what is currently occurring across the world is a religious war—between Christians/apostates/nonbelievers and Muslims. \textit{Dabiq} uses the classic sources to show that prophecy depicts there being an absence of “true” Islam prior to the Hour, that it would appear again as something “strange,” and that ISIS is persecuted and attacked because of its attempt to conduct Islamic Law as conservatively as possible. \textit{Dabiq} uses these arguments, stemming from an apocalyptic context, to appeal to Western Muslims in particular—who may be under attack due to their faith. In this way, the Islamic State has purposely begun to attempt to separate the world into only two camps—one of belief and one of disbelief.

\textbf{Violence and the Two Camps of the Final Hour}

Along with this strict interpretation of Shari’a Law enforced by the Islamic State remains the question for why the Islamic State has been so open in showing its violent actions to a global audience in appeals of recruitment. The most popular characteristic of the Islamic State’s media publications has arguably been its open broadcasting of beheadings and mass executions. While the video of James Foley’s beheading certainly caught the attention of media outlets across the world, it was not the first beheading video to ever appear. As discussed in the previous chapter, such a strategy had an extensive

\textsuperscript{351} \textit{Dabiq} 9:46-47
history within AQI under the authority of Abu Mus’ab Zaqarwi during the early 21st century. Yet with the increase in social media and the advancement of the Internet, ISIS has been able to reach a much wider audience than Zarqawi ever could in the early 21st century.

The Islamic State through the Internet has been able to provide images to a global audience with the click of a mouse. Recruits who may have been unable to find or sift through the materials of Bin Laden and Zarqawi now had Twitter (130 characters a tweet) to begin to examine the Islamic State’s media distributions. Dabiq is also no stranger to portraying the violence conducted by ISIS, and is littered with graphic images of dead bodies. Publically broadcasting such violence and graphic material, as discussed in the previous chapter, has often been criticized by jihadists as an ineffective strategy for recruitment, yet for unknown reasons such has remained a staple of ISIS’s media campaign.352

Much like its early founder Zaqarwi, ISIS does not hesitate to upload any number of violent acts on-line. In spite of this widespread criticism, even amongst other jihadist organizations such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS’s media has continued to use these violent publications in pursuit of recruitment and as a way to emphasize its commitment to its goals and ambitions. The question to this point has remained unanswered for why ISIS does this. I posit that one solution may come directly from the Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative and how ISIS understands itself and its actions prior to the Final Hour.

Videos released such as, Flames of War: Fighting has just begun, even depict violence new with high quality graphics and slow motion sequences as a way of further appealing to the masses. Executions and battle sequences are also often surrounded with Qur’anic

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352 McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse, 34.
recitation in the background—highlighting that the Islamic State seems to place violence with religion. I argue that the nature of the Islamic State’s violence is not solely used to draw in the occasional recruit looking for his or her chance to “freely” conduct violent acts. Rather the portrayal of such violence, much as the previous section discussed, has become the method of showing a higher level of “authenticity” and “piety” amongst members for recruits to latch onto. More importantly, these displays of violence are an added attempt to clearly separate believers and non-believers prior to the Day of Judgment.

The display of such violence against Muslims in particular may be a direct attempt to initiate the prophesized fitna to occur during the Final Hour. This fitna, according to classic sources, is understood as being a way of identifying the “true” and “pious” Muslims from unbelievers and those that refuse to submit to the Islamic tradition. The Islamic State’s media, as I argue, may be attempting to use this propagandized violence in expectation that it will convey, as they put it, the “extinction of the gray-zone”—between apostate and Muslim, the sacred and the profane, the nonbeliever of dar al-harb [land of war] and the believer of dar al-Islam [land of Islam], and finally between followers of the Dajjal and the followers of God.353

In a similar manner of Hisham Muhammad Abu Hakima’s The Antichrist and the Battle of Armageddon where prior to the Final Hour there would appear both the “camp of faith and the camp of godlessness,” Dabiq also narrates that a separation between these two camps would become increasingly apparent prior to the Final Hour.354 The actions being conducted by ISIS, in this way, are attempts to further divide the world into two

353 The title of Dabiq 7 is From Hypocrisy to Apostasy: the Extinction of the Grayzone
354 McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse, 113.
camps—one of faith and the other of disbelief. The Islamic State may be using unrestricted violence in order to make the separation more apparent. Most especially since Dabiq’s narrative is a reflection of the A’maq Cycle, which argues that only a small group of believers would be fighting against the Christian and Dajjal’s armies. Echoing the story of the Flood, ISIS believes that prior to the Final Hour there will no longer be room for individuals to remain on the fence, or as they state the “grayzone.” Each individual must either join the Islamic State or become an enemy who is justified in killing. The latter does not make discrepancies between Muslim and non-Muslim or combatant and citizen. Instead it only makes separation between ISIS and everyone else.

In The Fading Grayzone, Dabiq elaborates upon this notion:

If one wants to know the people of truth, then let him observe where the enemies’ arrows are aimed. Most of them—if not all—are now pointed at the Islamic State, its leaders, soldiers, and subjects. This crusade against the Islamic State is the greatest testimony from Allah...Anyone who says otherwise now should review his faith before death suddenly takes him while he stands with one foot in the trench of the crusaders and the other in the trench of the hypocrites while claiming he is in the grayzone! The mujahidin [one performing jihad] knows no grayzone. As the liar Bush truthfully said, ‘either you are with us or are with the terrorists.’ One with sincerity will realize there is no grayzone in this crusade against the Islamic State, and that the world has split into two encampments, one for the people of faith, the other for the people of kufr [disbelief], all in preparation for the final Malhamah....Finally, do not forget that Allah is with the Muslims and will never abandon them to His enemies. And the Islamic State will remain until its banner flies over Rome.355

Here the Islamic State makes reference to both the grayzone being separated into the people of faith and the people of kufr (disbelief), and also declaring that it is “all in preparation for the final Malhamah…and the Islamic State will remain until its banner flies over Rome.” The latter part of the statement, again, is a direct reference to the A’maq Cycle and the conquering of Rome that will take place. The Islamic State implies

355 Dabiq 4:43
that the destruction of this “grayzone” will help initiate the end times and make
distinction between enemy and ally. *Dabiq* points to the beginning of the 21st century and
the attacks of 9/11 as when the grayzone first began to instability:

The grayzone is critically endangered, rather on the brink of extinction. Its endangerment began with the blessed operations of September 11th, as these operations manifested two camps before the world for mankind to choose between, a camp of Islam—without the body of Khilafah to represent it at the time—and a camp of kufr [disbelief]—the crusader coalition. The operations quickly exposed the different deviant “Islamic” movements, the palace “scholars”…as all of them rushed to serve the crusaders led by Bush in the war against Islam. And so the grayzone began to wither.356

Here again we find that the Islamic State is framing the attacks against it as a part of
the “war against Islam.” *Dabiq* Issue 7 begins to discuss and predict what will happen
after the grayzone is completely dissolved:

Eventually, the grayzone will become extinct and there will be no place for
grayish calls and movements. There will only be the camp of Iman [faith] vs the
camp of kufr [disbelief]. Then, when Isa [Jesus] descends, breaks the cross…there
will not be any place for the camp of kufr to exist on Earth, not even as humbled
dhimmi subjects amongst the Muslims in the camp of truth…Therefore, the Beast
will appear and mark the hypocrites who remained as individuals hidden in the
camp of truth, thereby bringing an end to hypocrisy of the individual level after
the Malahim had finished hypocrisy on the level of calls and movements.357

Here the Islamic State refers to how the extinction of the grayzone will release the
series of events provided from the *Qur’an* prior to Final Hour—including the appearance
of the Beast. In this way, the Islamic State may be using violent imagery to gain the
initial attention of recruits, but I find that conducting un-restricted violence is not the
entire source of inspiration for those who join. Beyond the viciousness, the beheadings,
and mass killings is also a strategic attempt to place the reader and/or viewer into a

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356 *Dabiq* 7:54
357 *Dabiq* 7:66
personal test of one’s piety. The test of one’s faith comes from joining the Islamic State
despite the violence since the Final Hour is at hand. The violence, according to ISIS, is
all justified and is being done in accordance of fulfilling prophecy. Time, we find, within
the Islamic State’s narrative is tremendously short with meaning found everywhere and in
everything.

The grayzone is rapidly diminishing according to what is found Dabiq and will
continue to do so until the appearance of Jesus. A similar argument comes in Issue 11
where another reference is made to the A’maq Cycle’s narrative,

Finally, it is not the apostasy and deviance of the weak hearted and the hypocrites
that will lead to the truce with the Romans before the Hour; rather it is the
patience and perseverance of the mujahidin [those conducting jihad] on their way
to further consolidation and greater expansion in the face of the integration
crusade against Islam that will achieve such. O Allah, turner of hearts, keep our
hearts firm upon Your path until the last of us fights under the banner of al-Masih
[Jesus] against ad-Dajjal [the Antichrist].

The reader is left with a choice of being a believer and joining the Islamic State or
remain a disbeliever and on the side of Dajjal. The separation between these two distinct
camps remains one of if not the most fundamental part of its apocalyptic recruitment
strategy. There is no longer middle room for indecisiveness because of how short time
has become. By doing this, Dabiq is forcing individuals to choose between these two
increasingly distinctive camps. The use of Shari’a Law with Hudud punishments is only
to further separate believers from nonbelievers and apostates. It is takfirsm magnified
tenfold, but now with apocalyptic implications and results. The declaration of a Muslim
being a nonbeliever or apostate is no longer restricted to just Shi’a Muslims, but now
includes all who refuse to give ba’yah (allegiance) to the caliphate. By further expanding

358 Dabiq 11:54
this concept into being a part of the battle of *Malhamah* (Final battle prior to the Hour) between Jesus and the Dajjal, the Islamic State has been able to provide readers with the cosmological consequences of their choice—while promising the greatest of rewards.

There is no middle ground in this narrative—it is the “true” Muslims against everyone else. Discussing this argument *Issue 7* states, “As the world progresses towards al-*Malhamah al-Kubra*, the option to stand on the sidelines as a mere observer is being lost. As those with hearts disease by hypocrisy…are driven towards the camp of kufr [disbelief], those with a mustard seed of sincerity…are driven towards the camp of Iman [faith].”

This is a strategy not uncommon to apocalyptic literature. Cook contends that apocalyptic literature tends to formulate these two distinct camps prior to the Final Hour as a way of conducting a test of the Muslim populations. He states, “The desire for a *fitna*, a test of people’s faith in an ambiguous situation” is done because “the believer could become complacent if everything is too cut and dried for him.” The distinction between the two camps and the choice cannot be left as easy for the individual, but rather must be a strong test of their piety. A choice, according to ISIS’s narrative, that reflects a person’s religious identity and loyalty to the tradition. Muslims being killed are deemed as apostates because they chose to not join the Islamic State. This, however, can be overlooked when not taking its apocalyptic nature seriously.

It is essential to point out that the *Dabiq* propaganda serves a multitude of functions for the group, some which discuss its apocalyptic theology directly, some that do not. It is, however, important to note that every portion of *Dabiq* does discuss the end of the

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359 *Dabiq* 7: 66
360 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 143.
world and how ISIS understands it. A major portion of Dabiq does attempt to show that the caliphate could function as a legitimate nation-state for the foreseeable future, but does so in an apocalyptic frame. ISIS repeatedly makes reference to the idea of “remaining and expanding” and even named Issue 5 of Dabiq this phrase.

Yet, when looking at all of the issues of Dabiq, the concept of “remaining and expanding” is often followed by an apocalyptic reference or allusion to an apocalyptic hadith. In Issue 12 Just Terror, Dabiq writes “May Allah keep the Islamic State remaining and expanding until the mujahidin [participants in jihad] fight the armies of the crusaders near Dabiq.” Then again in Issue 8 by writing “it is the rejection of nationalism that will drive the Khilafah to continue expanding until it takes Constantinople and Rome from the Crusades and their allies by Allah’s permission.” Here the Islamic State is making clear references to their apocalyptic narrative by discussing Dabiq and the taking of the eschatological cities of Rome and Constantinople. Within Issue 5, dedicated to discussing “Remaining and Expanding,” there is another reference to the apocalyptic motivations behind its choice of terms. The end of this particular section repeats the conquest of Rome while stating “May Allah protect the Islamic State and support it until its army fights the crusaders near Dabiq.”

I argue that the Islamic State would be the first to agree that it is in fact trying to expand influence across the world, but not in pursuit of any political gain. As we have seen, the Islamic State is trying to frame its narrative into a religious war—between believer and nonbelievers. The remaining and expanding characteristic does not necessarily mean that ISIS is secretly hoping the end of the world will not occur so it can

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361 Dabiq 12:18
362 Dabiq 8:5
363 Dabiq 5:33
hold political power over other nation-states. We have seen that the Islamic State is quite adamant in using Shari’a Law as its basis of governing. Rather the notion expanding and remaining may imply that ISIS is viewing its agendas and violence fulfillment of prophecy. These references, however, can and have been overlooked by those approaching the group without a previous grasp on Islamic eschatology and the A’maq Cycle.

Conspiracies, Shi’a Plots, and the Jewish Dajjal

I attempted to use this chapter, so far, as a way of showing that Dabiq is an apocalyptic text. A text that discusses current and future issues within a religious framework, is heavily centered on the details of the A’maq Cycle, and provides how ISIS believes the end of the world is going to occur. I attempted to highlight that ISIS wants to ignite a religious war, is using Shari’a Law to portray its piety, and is attempting to conduct violence in a manner to separate the world into two distinct camps—belief and nonbelief. I also attempted to provide evidence that Dabiq is strongly influenced by classic narratives for how the Final Hour is to occur, citing apocalyptic hadiths at the end of every issue to encompass the magazines overall synopsis. Yet there are other angles of approaching Dabiq as an apocalyptic text, including its understanding of who or what the Dajjal is going to be during the Final Hour.

While it is true that the Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative tends to stick as closely as possible to the classical sources, I discovered that Dabiq dwells into what many today would call conspiracy theories. Yet unlike the novels of the later 20th and early 21st century, Dabiq avoids using any non-traditional source to support its view of the Dajjal in
particular. I point out this tendency to dwell into speculation of who the Dajjal may be or who may be working for the Dajjal in order to further highlight that *Dabiq* is an apocalyptic literature. As an apocalyptic literature, as my first claim stated in my introduction, we are able to understand that the formation of such texts tend to be fueled by higher levels of anxiety, religious persecution, and/or increased levels of violence and warfare. The latter two points have been emphasized throughout this chapter thus far.

The first point, however, only comes to fruition through analyzing how *Dabiq* discusses the Dajjal and his influence on the world. According to *Dabiq*, the Dajjal is particularly associated with both the Shi’a and Jewish traditions in attempt to attack the Islamic tradition and its followers. In an eerily similar manner of the modern literatures claiming a world-wide conspiracy against the Islamic tradition led by the Dajjal and Jews, the Islamic State *also* believes that the Dajjal is using Jews and Shi’a Muslims, as well as all other nations, in pursuit of destroying the Islamic tradition. For example Issue 11 of *Dabiq* notes:

Although the Western crusaders’ cooperation with Iran, Syria, and Russia, is undeniable, they attempt to downplay it officially to conceal their role in the war against the Muslims…and just as the Companions had to face coalitions of various Jewish, pagan, and hypocrite parties in the battle of al-Ahzab [battles thought to occur during the life of the Prophet Muhammad], the Muslims of the Islamic State face various coalitions of kuffar [disbelief] having a common interest in seeing the Khilafah [caliphate] destroyed. And just as the Companions reaction to the parties was one of faith…so too should the reaction of the Muslims be when seeing these numerous coalitions gathering and mobilizing.\(^{364}\)

Through this line of reasoning, the Islamic State portrays its current battles against American and its allies as similar to what the Prophet Muhammad faced during his own life. While appealing to be acting as the Prophet Muhammad did centuries prior, this statement clues us into the idea that the Islamic State believes there is a wider conspiracy

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\(^{364}\) *Dabiq* 11:46
occurring against them—including Russia, Iran, and Israel. In this way, the Islamic State further expands upon its ideas that a religious war is occurring, Muslims are under attack, and that two camps are manifesting prior to the Final Hour.

Dabiq’s narrative, however, is not limited to just making such claims on the current events occurring today. At other points Dabiq claims it was really Shi’a Muslims and Jews who were behind particular historical instances that led to war and destruction in Muslim society. This became most vibrant in Issue 13 of Dabiq The Rafidah: From Ibn Saba to the Dajjal. In this issue, heavily plagued with speculation of the Dajjal, ISIS spends time claiming that Shi’a Muslims were responsible for nearly every tragedy throughout Islamic history.

On page 44 Dabiq states,

The Rafidah [derogatory term for Shi’a Muslims] were behind the early fitan [civil war/strife] during the reigns of Uthman, Ali, and Mu’awiyah. The Rafidah waged war against the Abbasi Khilafah via the so-call “Fatimi” state. They supported the Mongols...They supported the Franks and the Crusaders in their invasions of Sham and Palestine…They aided the Americans in their invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. They supported the Nusayri regime in Sham and established a Rafidi [Shi’a] militia-state in Yemen. They will continue to wage war against the Muslims until the Rafidah [Shi’a] ultimately unite with the Jews under the banner of the Dajjal.365

Here Dabiq claims that it was really the Shi’a Muslims who were behind the crusades, Mongol invasions, and the increase of American forces in Iraq. Despite this outlandish claim, Dabiq refuses to cite any source outside of the Islamic tradition. Dabiq does not, as modern authors have done, incorporate non-traditional sources in order to support its claims. In this way, Dabiq’s argument continues on and develops upon the claim that Shi’a Muslims were conspiring with the Dajjal to destroy the Islamic Tradition:

365 Dabiq 13:44
Throughout history, they have never hesitated to cooperate with the Jews, Christians, and pagans against Islam and the Muslims. Thus, the Rafidah [Shi’a] are apostates who must be killed wherever they are to be found, until no Rafidi walks on the face of the earth, even if the jihad claimants despise such and even if the jihad claimants defend the Rafidah with their words day and night…It is therefore not surprising that the jihad claimants now wage war against the Islamic State while condemning the targeting of Rafidi temples, markets, and neighborhoods. Finally, the Rafidah await the Jewish Dajjal who they plot to support alongside the Jews against the Muslims. Thus, as the signs of the Hour approach, a Muslim should ignore the confusion spread by the callers to Hellfire and instead—while performing jihad—reflect upon the condition of the Rafidah, those who imitate them, and those who defend them, thereafter ask Allah to keep his heart firm upon Islam, protect him from the evil of the Dajjal and all other fitnah, and enlighten his heart with truth, until he meets Allah while He is pleased with him.  

The Islamic State spends a substantial amount of this issue arguing why it is that Shi’a Muslims (whom they refer to in the derogatory phrase Rafidah) should be the most targeted group. Rather than the typical takfiri argument, previously seen by ISI and AQI, Dabiq frames its argument against the Shi’a as being a final confrontation between the Dajjal and the Islamic tradition. Suddenly all Shi’a can be killed because they are in alignment with the Dajjal—according to ISIS’s apocalyptic narrative. Furthermore, according to the Islamic State, Shi’a Muslims have been the basis of all the problems facing the Muslim community. Echoing the arguments of Zarqawi years prior, ISIS views the Shi’a as the “near enemy” that must be dealt with first.  

Along this understanding of the Dajjal being in control of Shi’a Muslims, there is also claim that Jews are under the guidance of the Dajjal as well. In Issue 11 Dabiq claims,  

Their plan is to continue waging war against Islam until the emergence of the “Mahdi” of the Rafidah [Shi’ a], who, according to them, will speak Hebrew, rule by the Torah, be followed by the Jews, and kill all the Arabs—attributes undoubtedly befitting the Jewish Dajjal not the Muslim Mahdi…The Rafidah overall are more barbaric and united than the crusaders themselves, but the mujahidin [those participating in jihad] of the Khilafah have sharpened many

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366 Dabiq 13:45
knives and prepared many car bombs to slaughter the flocks of Rafidi sheep until the last Rafidi under the banner of ad-Dajjal [the Antichrist] dies.\textsuperscript{367}

In this way, Shi’a attacks become justifiable and Jews are understood as being under the control of the Dajjal as well. At the end of Issue 13 the apocalyptic hadith provided expands upon this anxiety existing amongst ISIS members, “Rasulullah said, ‘The Dajjal will be followed by seventy thousand Jews from Asbahan [Isfahan] wearing talisman [shoulder-draped shawls]’ [Reported by Muslim from Anas].”\textsuperscript{368} Here we again find that \textit{Dabiq} attempts to make its entire issue relate to the classic apocalyptic hadith. This “conspiracy” is based on a belief a that it was a Jew who had created the Shi’a sect of Muslims. As the title of Issue 13 implies, the Shi’a were formed by the Jew Ibn Sabba. In regard to who Ibn Sabba is \textit{Dabiq} claims,

About him, Ibn Taymiyyah said, ‘The first to innovate Rafd [Shi’a] was a heretical hypocrite named ‘Abdullah Ibn Saba’. He wanted thereby to corrupt the religion of the Muslims like Paul—the author of the letters read by the Christians—innovated for the Christians heresies by which he corrupted their religion. Paul was a Jew who hypocritically faked Christianity with the intent to corrupt it. Ibn Saba was also a Jew intending the same. He strived to spread falsehood aiming to corrupt the religion, but was unable to do so. However, some discord and strife occurred amongst the Muslims, strife in which Uthman was killed. Thereafter the \textit{fitna} transpired’ [Majmu al-Fatawa].\textsuperscript{369}

Similar to conspiracy theories rampant in modern apocalyptic novels, \textit{Dabiq} attempts to claim that there is a larger force behind historical occurrences against the Islamic tradition—due largely to the influence of the Dajjal. This point, when understanding \textit{Dabiq} as an apocalyptic text, is highlighting the high mistrust and anxiety held towards the Shi’a leaders of Iraq and Syria. This anxiety, however, is not limited to just Shi’a

\textsuperscript{367} \textit{Dabiq} 11:54 \\
\textsuperscript{368} \textit{Dabiq} 13 \\
\textsuperscript{369} \textit{Dabiq} 13:32
Muslims or Jews. Rather, Sunni Muslims who oppose ISIS or live in nations that are combatting ISIS become a part of the Dajjal’s plans and are thus justifiable to be killed and combatted (recall the burning of the Jordanian pilot). The apocalyptic frame of Dabiq helps emphasize the anxiety existing within and the tactics being conducted by the Islamic State. Without understanding Dabiq as an apocalyptic literature such an analysis is dismissed.

The purpose of global fitna remains an initial place to start in hope of understanding ISIS as an apocalyptically, not nationally or politically, motivated terrorist organization. Certainly the Islamic State is concerned with America, Israel, and other enemies such as Russia, but these fall behind what is seen as the closest enemy to ISIS’s theology—Muslims (Sunni, Shi’a, Sufi) who are deemed apostates. The final battles with the Christians remain at the end of the apocalyptic narrative, but prior to that there must first be a clear separation between believer and nonbeliever. This notion then plays directly into the Islamic State’s adamant attempt to “purify” the Islamic religion from all they deem as apostates. This conception of purification, however, can also be missed by those dismissing the religious motivations of the Islamic State.

Viewing the Islamic State from a “monolithic” analysis, which Wood has claimed has been occurring so far, scholars attempt to remove Dabiq and ISIS from any apocalyptic context. Rather ISIS motives are simplified to only really be nationalistic motivations, but this is contradictory to what Dabiq is saying. ISIS states that nationalistic motivations and agendas were actually the doings of the West in order to delegitimize the “unity” that could arise from a religiously motivated jihadist moment that attempts to unite all believers against all nonbelievers. Dabiq claims the West used tactics, such as
nationalism and democracy, in attempt of destabilizing the Middle East and removing all “pious” Muslims from positions of power—again pointing to a level of anxiety and skepticism existing amongst its members. For example Dabiq references the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the State of Israel as evidence:

The historical origin of the ‘Arab Spring’ banners—rather most of the flags raised by various Arab apostate regimes—is a flag designed by the British crusader Mark Sykes. Yes, Mark Sykes of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which divided the Muslims’ lands into nationalist states, the same crusader who promoted the infamous Balfour Declaration behind the establishment of the Jewish State… Sykes, together with his peers and leaders, devised a plan to further divide the broken Muslims’ lands into nationalist states. The Muslims’ lands had been polluted by pagan domes and plagued by manmade laws at the hands of Ottoman rules. 370

Dabiq concludes by reiterating that all of this, despite the planning of Western leaders, is only a part of a series of events to occur prior to the Final Hour:

As the nonbelieving factions continue executing the orders of puppet regimes, and Nusayri forces step up their bombing campaign…in a desperate attempt to stop the Islamic State’s advance, the armies of the Khilafah will continue marching towards Dabiq, and soon after that, towards al-Aqsa by Allah’s permission…“The Prophet said, ‘The stronghold of the Muslims on the day of al-Malhamah will be in al-Ghitah, next to a city called Dabiq, one of the biggest cities of Sham’ [Reported by Abu Dawud from Abud-Darda]. 371

The Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative, and understanding of the West and the Dajjal, also introduces Russia and China into this worldwide agenda being led against the Islamic Tradition. Dabiq writes, “And after centuries of Western conflict with Persia and Russia, we find that two Western leaders—Bush and Obama—are determined to do everything possible to strengthen Persian and Russian influence in the Middle East.” 372

Here again is another sign of ISIS anxiety and skepticism towards the way the world is

370 Dabiq 9: 20-21
371 Dabiq 4:36
372 Dabiq 4:38
currently functioning. This theory is elaborated upon by discussing how it relates to the current events happening against the Islamic State:

Most significantly, Russia—Iran’s biggest ally as well as an ally of China—has entered the Ukraine, which is supposedly claimed by the West. Russia continues to arm the Assad regime against the Muslims of Sham...And yet Obama insists upon strengthening “the Persian Crescent” and Russian influence in the region. It seems American leaders are blinded by their love of the Jewish State into doing things that only damage supposed Western influences.373

Here Dabiq’s apocalyptic narrative becomes more like the narratives found in modern literatures than the classic sources. Yet throughout this all there remains only Islamic sources and speculation used to support such claims. Dabiq attempts to keep classic apocalyptic hadiths away from these speculations on current events in order of avoiding any misconceptions or inaccurate claims to be discovered. This strategy, I argue, was done in order for the reader to come to their own conclusions on what was occurring around them, while also avoiding making incorrect predictions that would damage its apocalyptic narrative.

In Issue 12 Dabiq further elaborates upon its apocalyptic narrative/theory that everyone is teaming up against the Islamic State as a part of the Dajjal’s agenda, “Despite the rivalries between the Rafidah [Shi’a] and the Jewish state, they will have more in common with each other than other religions of kufr. They both await a “savior” whom they allege will wipe out the followers of Allah’s Messenger. And the Russian intervention in Sham has brought an opportunity for the Rafidah and the Jewish state to get closer to each other through Russia.”374

There begins to be an emphasis on proving to its audience that the real reason behind the constant attacks on the Islamic State is because they are the final Muslims

373 Dabiq 4:40
374 Issue 12 page 46
prophesized in the A’maq Cycle. Beyond this initial layer of analysis, however, is the view that ISIS possesses a high level of skepticism towards what is occurring around its territory today. There is anxiety and fear that Muslims are being attacked because of their faith. These perceived attacks are then redirected as fulfillment of prophecy. By referencing yet another hadith, the Islamic State hopes to fully articulate to its audience that everything occurring will result in the return of Jesus prior to the Day of Judgement.

He explained that the Muslims would not cease to fight parties of the kuffar [disbelief] until Isa [Jesus] descends and leads the Muslim armies. He said, ‘Indeed, fighting the kuffar, Hijrah [migration], and jihad will remain until the establishment of the Hour.’ Allah’s Messenger said, ‘Hijrah will not cease to exist until repentance ceases to be accepted, and repentance will not cease to be accepted until the sun rises from the West’ [Reported by Abu Dawud from Mu’awiyah]…He also said, ‘There will not cease to exist a group of my nation fighting upon the truth, manifest until the Day of Judgment. [Reported by Muslim from Jabir].375

Concluding Remarks on Dabiq

The examples provided in this chapter were picked from amongst nearly sixty-five pages of notes taken from the thirteen issues of Dabiq. Due to the scope of this research it would be impossible to list every passage that mentioned the Dajjal, Jesus, or the al-Malhamah al-Kubra. Isa [Jesus] plays a colossal role in the Islamic State’s new narrative and helps articulate that ISIS has placed itself at the end of Islamic history and is using the A’maq Cycle to make sense of its actions and the events occurring around ISIS. In Dabiq, the Mahdi is no longer desirable because the caliphate has been established in his place and will remain and expand until the return of Jesus. It is of course important to note that Dabiq is quite extensive in length and often is separated into a variety of sections, chapters, and topics. This makes it easy to look past the Islamic State’s

375 Issue 9 page 47
apocalyptic narrative, especially without a baseline understanding of Islamic eschatology and the hadiths that ISIS references. By pulling out proponents of its apocalyptic narrative from Dabiq, I attempted to emphasize that there is a strong influence of the A’maq Cycle on the actions and motivations of the Islamic State.

Understanding the Islamic State’s magazine as an apocalyptic literature in this way helps make sense of the group in two distinct ways. First, it provides evidence and insight into why ISIS has enacted such high levels of violence against Muslim and non-Muslims alike, why ISIS is implementing a strict version of Shari’a Law, and why the Islamic State is attempting to separate the world into two distinct camps. Second when Dabiq is understood as an apocalyptic text, new analysis can be formed for why messianic speculation would arise in the 21st century and be at the forefront and a terrorist organization.

The latter part can be seen in how Dabiq perceives the role of the Islamic tradition, as ISIS defines it, in a modernizing and secularizing world. The increase of Western powers and styles of government are in direct contrast with how ISIS understands the way the world should be governed and ruled. The skepticism towards Shi’a Muslims (Iran in particular), America, and even Muslim leaders depicted in Dabiq as a part of the Dajjal’s plan, can also be understood as insights into the anxiety that Sunni Muslims may be possessing towards all three powers. View Dabiq as an apocalyptic text does not imply it provides any truth claims for ISIS or its theology, but rather is an attempted analysis at why apocalyptic speculation could arise and popularize so quickly in the first place.

For this reason, I found it beneficial to take ISIS and Dabiq at its word—that both are inspired by apocalyptic and messianic speculation for the future. As Cook as stated, and I
continuously reference, that “the very adoption of a worldview that leads to a messianic future implies that the present system is at least partially a failure.” In this manner, Dabiq is a text depicting why the present is a failure and how the Islamic State attempts to correct it.

376 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 312.
Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

Predictions of violence made on the basis of beliefs alone are notoriously unreliable….it does appear, however, that apocalyptists are more likely to engage in violence if they believe themselves to be trapped or under attack. Both conditions are as much the product of their own perception as of outside forces.\textsuperscript{377} 

Michael Barkun

In this thesis, I have attempted to highlight a range of topics concerning why taking the Islamic State’s apocalyptic nature as a serious motivating factor in its ongoing development is needed for the broader discussion of what the group is attempting to achieve. While this is not the only angle of approaching the Islamic State’s motivations and aspirations, I attempted to highlight the benefits and additional perspectives that can be provided through such an analysis. This thesis has been an attempt to uncover why the group has formed and its ongoing development rather than solely on how the group should be combatted and destroyed. Recent approaches for understanding the Islamic State have attempted to divorce the group from its religious identification and the classic Islamic texts ISIS is referencing. Yet by refusing to acknowledge the Islamic State’s religious identity, a major proponent of the group may have been completely dismissed so far—namely an apocalyptic nature that is being used as a source of inspiration for the group’s formation, development, recruitment, style of governing, use of unrestricted violence, and possible end goals

By analyzing the Islamic State through its apocalyptic narrative, I have been able to help illustrate how ISIS seems to have been profoundly inspired by the Final Hour, and how it will continue to conduct activities in attempt to bring it about. In this same process, I have also shown that apocalyptic speculation and literature (within the Islamic

\textsuperscript{377} Filiu and DeBevoise, \textit{Apocalypse in Islam}, 193.
tradition) tends to arise during moments when Muslims possess high levels of anxiety, distrust of foreign powers or governments, religious persecution, and/or are moments of extensive warfare and violence. Iraq and Syria, during the 21st century, seem to have been the breeding ground for all of these issues to exist alongside heavily violent jihadist organizations like Al-Qaeda in Iraq and Islamic State in Iraq. By understanding the Islamic State as an apocalyptically inspired jihadist organization bent on purifying the Islamic religion, we are able to see an additional perspective for who the Islamic State is, what members are attempting to join, and why ISIS has resorted in such high levels of publicized violence against Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

I began my thesis by first highlighting what could be found within the Qur’an, and early extra-Quranic literatures, as well as how the latter has influenced the development of Islamic eschatology through modernity. As discussed in chapter one, the Qur’an’s early Meccan Surahs tended to be heavily focused on the Day of Judgement, the Final Hour’s imminence, and natural disasters. These early references, I argue, may have been the direct outcome of the social, religious, and political environment that the Prophet Muhammad and early Muslim community were living a part of in Mecca prior to the Hijrah in 622 C.E. It was during this time period that the early Muslim community faced high levels of religious persecution and oppression for their monotheistic message, even to the point of enduring violent threats and economic sanctions from the leading Quraysh tribe in control of Mecca. Much like other moments of apocalyptic literature forming in Islamic history, this early period highlights that there were widespread feelings of anxiety towards the future, persecution for belief, and an inherent distrust of the governing powers.
Yet the Qur’an itself, as Cook noted, should be understood and analyzed today as eschatological rather than an apocalyptic. This slight difference is due to how the Qur’an lacks specific details on what will occur during the Final Hour—especially in regard to what will transpire within Islamic societies and the Muslims that inhabit them. Instead the Qur’an functions more as a moral guide to the individual who needs to constantly work on his or her piousness before the Final Hour—since it could occur at any moment. In this manner, we find that it would be early extra-Qur’anic sources (hadith collections and Kitab al-Fitan) that provided the missing details concerning the Hour. These extra-Qur’anic sources would soon become the leading narratives for apocalypse as history progressed, and the details within them seem to have been heavily influenced by the sociocultural, political, and theological events of the time in which they written.

Much like apocalyptic authors have done today, these early literatures attempted to provide answers for the doubts and fears rampant in the time they were written. Anxiety from internal strife among Muslims, as well as constant warfare with the Byzantines, would allow for early authors to develop one of the most popular end time narratives in Islamic eschatology—referred to as the A’maq Cycle. This narrative would periodically recycle itself as a leading authority on the end times during moments where Islamic societies were in confrontation with Christians, including during the crusades in the Middle Ages. It would also be during this period in Islamic history that the word fitna developed an apocalyptic connotation and became a major Sign of the Hour for which to watch for. This idea has now been fully expanded upon by the Islamic State, which seems to be heavily fixated on “purifying” the religion in order to separate itself from all other Muslims and nonbelievers.
Chapter two then proceeded to the modern era (beginning at the end of the 19th century) and highlighted three messianic inspired revolutions that occurred in the Middle East and North Africa. These revolutions would be spurred by the events happening around them and became reactions to an increased level of anxiety and alarm on what many saw as Western society impeding upon the values of the Islamic tradition. The inherent increase of Western power across the Middle East and North Africa, by way of colonization, would reignite similar feelings that had plagued the early Muslim communities. In this way, widespread fear and anxiety would stir revolutions or armed insurgencies against the leading government establishments of Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. In wake of 1979, year 1400 of the Islamic calendar, the Siege of Mecca, Iranian Revolution, and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan would all spur the most recent apocalyptic speculation in the Middle East. The decades following 1979 would spawn a new genre of literature across—apocalyptic fiction.

This new genre of literature, written by a multitude of different authors with a variety of backgrounds, would over only a short time period become a top selling genre for Middle Eastern book publishing companies. The reason for this popularity would come from how authors continuously attempted to connect nearly every current event with a Sign of the Hour mentioned in the classic end time sources discussed in chapter one. Unlike the earliest literatures, however, these modern works often incorporated an assortment of non-traditional sources into their narratives. This strategy soon became the standard for how these novels would function, allowing the genre to become filled with “conspiracy theories” discussing UFOs, the Bermuda Triangle, and Freemasonry to name a few. The focal point of these novels, however, was typically dedicated to discussing
Israel and America as both being the servants of the Dajjal—who was attempting to take
over the world by attacking the Islamic tradition. This development and popularization of
such novels would bizarrely begin to transpire at nearly the same time as the
revitalization of global jihad, the 9/11 attack in New York, and American Wars in Iraq
and Afghanistan. This would allow for the authors of modern novels the ability to begin
drawing connections between all of the events to further fuel apocalyptic speculation
across the region.

In Chapter three, I shifted focus away from Islamic eschatology and began analyzing
the early formation of the Islamic State beginning with Abu Mus’ab al-Zaqarwi. From
there I moved forward in history and pinpointed instants where apocalyptic speculation
influenced the development and trajectory of the group from AQI to ISIS. By
highlighting the Islamic State’s shift from belief in the Mahdi’s appearance to state
building and awaiting the return of Jesus, I found that the Islamic State reconstructed its
narrative around the details of the A’maq Cycle—filled with fitna, the Dajjal, and battles
with Christians (now interpreted as the United States of America). It would be after this
shift that the group began to heavily reference and be inspired by the classic narration for
how the end times was going to transpire. Under the guidance of the A’maq Cycle, ISIS
began focusing its attention on administrating Shari’a Law, attacking Shi’a Muslims and
Sunni tribes that refused allegiance, and conducting a variety of strategies in tune with
what was foretold to happen—including legalizing slavery, igniting a religious war, and a
final battle against the Christians/Byzantines/Romans (now understood as America) in
Dabiq.
After this analysis of the apocalyptic development of ISIS, I looked exclusively at a primary source released by the Islamic State in chapter four. In my research of *Dabiq*, I discovered that the Islamic State was undoubtedly referencing the A’maq Cycle and seems to have been motivated by *and* openly discussing the details found within it. Advances on taking control of regions like Dabiq, the use of Shari’a Law with strict *hudud* punishments, and the legalization of slavery were now justified as vital actions for not only showing piety but also fulfilling prophecy. Also, *Dabiq’s* apocalyptic narrative appears to have been constructed in a manner that places every incident, speech, attack, victory, and defeat as being justified in order to fulfil prophecy and usher in the Final Hour.

I discovered *Dabiq* also adopted similar conspirator undertones that had become rampant in modern novels—this was done in order highlight that *Dabiq* is an apocalyptic text. We find *Dabiq* continuously references the Dajjal, his influence on the world’s morality, and his perceived ability to use Jewish and Shi’a traditions to undermine the “true” message of Islam. While *Dabiq* does not fall prey to discussing UFOs or the Bermuda Triangle, the magazine is no stranger to making claims that there has been a plotted agenda throughout history against the Islamic tradition—led by the Dajjal. This included the notion that a Jew purposely formed the Shi’a sect to lead Muslims astray from the example of Muhammad, and is why Shi’a and Sunni Muslims must fight each other prior to the Hour. In this manner *Dabiq is* an apocalyptic text—one that lays out the Islamic State’s view of the world, how it plans to fix it, and how every individual will be a participant in events prior to the Final Hour. The end goals, theology, motivations, recruitment strategies, and broadcasting of violent acts are all depicted in *Dabiq* as clear
pursuit of separating the “land of Islam” from the” land of disbelief” prior to the Final Hour.

The destruction of ancient monuments, the mass killing of Sunni and Shi’a Muslims, and the devastation brought to the region is depicted as the pursuit of purifying the Islamic tradition. These strategies, I argue, are not solely in pursuit of a political or nationalistic government that will discard its religious attire as soon as it stops being attacked from outside forces. Rather, the additional insight provided from the method of approach used in this thesis, brings to light exactly how the Islamic State's caliphate will (as of now) remain to be run solely by Shari’a Law—a religious motivation.

This thesis finds that the group is attempting to establish a religious war in an attempt to (re)establish God’s Law over the laws of man, which ISIS believes has been removed by Western styles of government. This argument is made most clear in how ISIS references the Great Flood of Noah. On this topic, according to ISIS’s apocalyptic narrative, there is another flood coming to earth, but this time it will be the caliphate (not the ark) that has been sent to save humanity from death and punishment. In this manner, the Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative claims everything destroyed currently will soon be fixed or re-created in the future.

The Islamic State’s strategy, under this impression of the role of the caliphate, then attempts to separate the world into two distinct camps—belief and disbelief. This analysis, however, can be easily glossed over by approaches that do not take religious motivations as serious factors in the Islamic State’s actions and aspirations. In Dabiq, the Islamic State has constructed its role and battles against its enemies as religious in nature, not politically or nationally interested. For example in Issue 10 Dabiq states, “Our
war with the Kurds is a religious war. It is not a nationalistic war—we seek the refuge of Allah. We do not fight Kurds because they are Kurds. Rather we fight the kuffar amongst them, the allies of the crusaders and Jews in their war against the Muslims. As for the Muslim Kurds, then they are our people and brothers wherever they may be.”  

The Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative places the group at the end of Islamic history for this particular reason. The end of the world is thought to bear witness, especially in regards to the A’maq Cycle, a final religious war between believers and nonbelievers. For it is during the Final Hour that there is perceived to be a clear separation made between belief and disbelief—much like there was thought to have been during the life of Noah prior to the Flood. According to Dabiq, the present world has failed to such a degree that the only option left is to destroy it and make way for what comes next—a world ruled under God’s Law. These are not the aspirations of only just politics, but rather echo religious rhetoric and a distinct view the world through a theological lens.

David Cook in Studies of Muslim Apocalyptic notes that a strong desire to transform society through religion is perhaps the most essential and shared feature of Islamic apocalyptic literature. He writes:

The apocalypticist is saying that the present order is not sufficient, and that this “formal” Islam has failed to bring the messianic golden age. He is not satisfied with the present, and so he must give hope for the future. This is the very essence of the restoration myth: at the End the things that have been degraded and destroyed during the interim period will be rebuilt and restored. The call for just government was, and is today, the hallmark of every revolutionary apocalyptic and messianic Muslim group and needs to be recognized as such. Closely connected to this is the apocalypticist’s indictment of their own society. Though one is tempted to say that these attacks are exaggerated, doubtless for that particular time they represent the views of a certain alienated group, which during

378 Dabiq 10:34
periodic intervals of messianic and apocalyptic fervor was joined by a much larger group.\textsuperscript{379}

In this way, the Islamic State’s apocalyptic nature should \textit{not} be viewed as crazed speculations of the coming Hour. In this way, the Islamic State’s apocalyptic belief should \textit{not} be dismissed as political aims disguised as religious belief in order to exploit ancient texts. In this way, the Islamic State’s battles and violence should \textit{not} be understood as pursuit of nationalistic agendas. For ISIS, \textit{Dabiq} is a direct reflection for how it views the current state of the world, its society, and its religious tradition as being far removed from how the messianic future was \textit{supposed} to look. It would appear that the Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative has been quite successful in grabbing the attention of thousands across the world who share a similar reflection of the current world. Dismissing the Islamic State’s theological and apocalyptic view of the world avoids taking the Islamic State at its word, and may prove to be a strategy that only further supports its claims and narrative in a region filled with constant warfare and destruction.

I argue that this approach provides an additional analysis of the group’s origins, development, and future aspirations that can then be included in the wider discussion of what ISIS really wants. Dismissing this serious component and inspiration of the Islamic State may lead to tactics and strategies that only play right into the Islamic State’s narrative. For example, Western politicians and presidential candidates who view the group as not being religiously motivated may be providing ample support for the group’s claims across the world. Recently one presidential candidate stated, “If I am elected president, we will utterly destroy ISIS. We won’t weaken them. We won't degrade them.

\textsuperscript{379} Cook, \textit{Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic}, 234.
We will utterly destroy them. We will carpet bomb them into oblivion,” while also promising increased surveillance of Muslim neighborhoods *in America*. Another candidate publically declared “Islam hates us,” whole also promising to deport immigrant Muslims from the United States, and acknowledged that he wants to deny all Syrian immigrants (fleeing the Islamic State) access and safety in the United States. Such rhetoric in combatting the Islamic State may prove to be quite dangerous in how it plays right into the Islamic State’s narrative there is a prevalent and widespread attack on the Islamic tradition—not *just* the Islamic State.

The ability for ISIS to redirect every action and speech to support its claim of being the final group of fighters, I argue, makes eliminating the group more difficult than just trying to “destroy and degrade” the group out of existence. The latter strategy has appeared to be the tactic of choice for combatting Al-Qaeda, yet time has shown that even this group has been able to adapt and evolve in the wake such a strategy so far. The apocalyptic speculation existing within ISIS, however, makes the group even more dangerous and worrisome for the future by how it is heavily focused on destruction and violence. An increase of attacks on the Islamic State may result in the group becoming more likely to resort to drastic options and wide scale attacks outside of Iraq and Syria. Forcing the hand of an apocalyptically inspired group may only ignite further apocalyptic speculation, increase its recruitment appeal, and may force the group to conduct untold amounts of violence and destruction throughout its controlled regions in hopes of ushering in the appearance of the Final Hour.

In this same light, an appearance of “boots on the ground” from American forces could also prove to be most detrimental for a long term resolution. This strategy of
attacking ISIS by way of American soldiers has become the greatest desire from the Islamic State—despite the clear difference between the two militarily. For ISIS, the appearance of American forces will ignite the Final Hour and will be the beginning of the “Last Crusade.” The Islamic State wants a religious war between the “Crusader” West and a group of Muslims attempting to establish a caliphate, because the appearance of Western forces (especially in Dabiq) would further amplify ISIS’s notion the West is attempting to target the Islamic tradition. By basing its apocalyptic narrative around the A’maq Cycle, ISIS has been able to view the appearance of the West, who ISIS defines as the Romans or Byzantines, as the fulfillment of prophecy and with it could ignite a sudden wave of energy and appeal across the world.

In this way, the Islamic State capitalizes on the actions of the West and Muslim governments unlike that of previous Islamist jihadist movements. Rather than attempt to remove the West from Saudi Arabia, the Islamic State encourages more attacks from the West and then re-directs them into its apocalyptic narrative. The A’maq Cycle, in this way, became the perfect narrative to follow for ISIS in regards to current events. A major aspect for ISIS remains a discussion of what will happen during the final battles against the Christians, “They will then fight and a third (part) of the army would run away, whom Allah will never forgive. A third (part of the army) which would be constituted of excellent martyrs in Allah's eye, would be killed and the third who would never be put to trial would win and they would be conquerors of Constantinople.”

With this constantly being the main point of its narrative, i.e. victory by the will of God against the greatest of odds, the Islamic State has placed the Western world into a complex scenario where any action or speech can come across as fulfillment of prophecy.

380 Dabiq 1
Much like how the Branch Davidian Cult of the late 20th century used the American federal government raid on its Waco compound as fulfillment of apocalyptic belief, the appearance of American troops in Syria (at this moment in time) could prove only to magnify the Islamic State’s narrative and recruitment tenfold.

These complications, however, can easily be over looked by those dismissing religious motivation being another factor to consider when analyzing the Islamic State. Dismissing the Islamic State from the Islamic tradition also terminates any additional insight that can be provided through analyzing the group’s Dabiq magazine—i.e. its apocalyptic literature. It is important to note that apocalyptic belief certainly did not originate with ISIS nor is it implicitly tied to the interpretation that the Islamic State has given it. What should be recognized is that apocalyptic speculation and produced literature seems to arise at distinct moments of time where there are high levels of anxiety and speculation that the present state of the world has utterly failed. The Islamic State is simply the latest group to tap into such belief as a source of inspiration and direction for how to correct the failed status of the world.

I do not hope to downplay the reality of how dangerous the Islamic State remains through this analysis or provide any justification for the acts it has committed. The threat of the group conducting large-scale attacks in Western cities remains real, its mass killing of Sunni and Shi’a tribes across Iraq and Syria remains real, and the awareness that the group would quickly use a nuclear bomb against its enemies, if ever in possession of one, remains quite real. The reasons for conducting any of these attacks, however, all play into the Islamic State’s apocalyptic nature and how it understands itself. To this point, however, such an analysis of the Islamic State has largely been dismissed.
Understanding the Islamic State through its apocalyptic nature provides additional viewpoints into why the group has been able to form, become popular, and helps provide insight into why it has conducted such high levels of violence. Religious motivations are certainly not the only reason for the Islamic State’s choice to establish the caliphate and conduct such wide scale violence, but in the same light they should not be so easily dismissed either. Instead, the apocalyptic analysis should be included into the wider discussion of what ISIS is and what it is fighting to achieve. Understanding the Islamic State in this way provides fresh insight into why the group has been able to flourish at a level unlike that of other jihadist movements.

The annihilation of the current “entity” calling itself the Islamic State will not necessarily mean the destruction of apocalyptic speculation from reoccurring. This is especially the case in regions of civil unrest, high anxiety, living under constant warfare, and fear of Western nations and the drone strikes being conducted throughout Iraq and Syria. The “collateral damage” from drone strikes intrinsically may only add more reason to distrust the West, and this makes tackling a group like the Islamic State nearly impossible without sending un-intended ripple effects across the Middle East. Each attack from the West can now be referenced as attacks against the Islamic tradition and will continue to be exploited by apocalyptic minded believers—who have a wide variety of classic sources depicting a final confrontation with “Christian Rome.”

The Islamic State, in this way, has been able to already continuously fuel itself off of the actions and words of the West and even Middle Eastern government leaders. This strategy may have opened the floodgates for similar tactics being incorporated by Islamist jihadist organizations in the future. The Islamic State may have only been the first
modern manifestation of an apocalyptically inspired revolution, and in this way it may have only provided the blueprint for what to do and what to avoid. Recall how the Islamic State was able to quickly learn from its earliest mistakes when claiming that the Mahdi was going to appear at any moment. In the wake of being proven wrong and losing credence among other jihadist groups and members, ISI nearly destroyed itself by focusing all of its efforts and appeal on the intimate return of the Mahdi.

In a very short time, however, the group, under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, evolved its narrative and began to suddenly focus on the establishment of the caliphate, state building, and the return of Jesus prior to the Final Hour—but refused to acknowledge exactly when such events would occur. If the Islamic State was able to evolve and learn from its mistakes made only years prior, the same could prove true for another Islamist militant organization coming after ISIS. The destruction of the Islamic State does not necessarily mean the destruction of apocalyptic speculation. This is vital to recognize. As long as there remains distrust of the West, anxiety towards the future role of the Islamic tradition in a secularizing world, wide scale violence and years of warfare, and a shared belief that the current world is a failure, apocalyptic speculation will continue to thrive and be exploited.

In this way, I argue, the death of Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi or the removal of the caliphate from Iraq and Syria will not mean the end of apocalyptic thought, distrust of Western nations, or the use of jihad. Al-Qaeda, as an example of the persistence of jihadist movements, has been able to remain relevant even after the death of Osama Bin Laden. In the same way, the death of al-Baghdadi or the removal of the Islamic State
does not automatically remove the root problem of why the Islamic State has become so powerful and popular in such a short time frame.

Approaching the group as only being able to be defeated by bombs, Western armies, and drone strikes remains a very short sighted approach for analyzing the underlining issue for why ISIS was able to develop in the first place. Dismissing the Islamic State’s apocalyptic beliefs and constructed narrative has become problematic by attempting to continuously “degrade and destroy” a group that only encourages more opponents to attack it, glorifies the deaths of its members, and continues to depict violent actions through its media as validated through religious sources and prophecies. This analysis of the Islamic State has been an attempt to highlight additional viewpoints for why a group as violent and destructive as ISIS has been able to draw in thousands of foreign recruits, take control of regions across Iraq and Syria, and for why it has attempted so adamantly attack other Muslim populations.

In the time that has elapsed since first beginning this research, the Islamic State has conducted planned attacks in Paris and Brussels, taken claim of being behind the San Bernardino attacks, and has been targeted by a variety of military strikes from both America and now Russia. Rumors have been spread and then adamantly denied by ISIS on claims of death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and there have been towns and regions across Syria and Iraq that have been re-taken by Syrian and Iraqi forces from ISIS control. Over the course of the next months, years, or even decades there may be a complete annihilation of the Islamic State or perhaps they will continue to exist as Al-Qaeda has been able to—not as a state but as another jihadist organization in diaspora with members spread out across the Middle East and possibly the world.
The narrative of ISIS is under constant flux and this makes analyzing the group in real time quite difficult, if not impossible. The results of certain actions and strategies cannot be known until time has progressed significantly, both on the part of America and the Islamic State. There remains no underlying single cause for the Islamic State’s development and formation, but I find that the apocalyptic narrative it has constructed is a good starting point. The rapid advancement of technology, mass media’s increasing popularity, and constant airtime provided on TV for every action conducted has provided the Islamic State a new ability to spread its message to a global audience.

Migrating to the Middle East or being able to come across a long drawn out video of Bin Laden in a cave are no longer requirements needed in order to hear the messages of jihadist organizations. ISIS, to this point, has been the most successful in this way and such a tactic has undoubtedly led to its increased amount of recruits and widespread appeal. Yet it is the message that ISIS is communicating that should be understood and tackled, not just tactics for “degrading and destroying” them. Apocalyptic views of the world are nothing new to the Islamic tradition and have long been used as sources of inspiration and revolution. I end with a quote from David Cook, to whom I owe much of my ability to study ISIS from an apocalyptic viewpoint, with how he summarizes the history of apocalypticism within the Islamic tradition:

Though ultimately Islam as a whole did not treat apocalyptic favorably, the scholar, after a judicious examination of this material [classic apocalyptic literature], should be able to come to the conclusion that here we have material that, when first used, provided one of the principal sources of the energy needed to conquer the enormous territory conquered by the Muslims during the first century of Islam, and to establish it as a vital religion…This material proves that the power that drove the first Muslims was belief that they were living in the Last Days, and had to accomplish these things before the Day of Judgement. The material investigated in this study was an integral part of the ideological
foundations of early Islam, and continues to this day to provide Muslims with the energy and inspiration to accomplish incredible deeds.”

To dismiss the possibility of the Islamic State possessing similar apocalyptic inspirations, and the energy that it can be produced amongst believers, may only prove quite detrimental in future actions against the Islamic State.

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APPENDIX A: Apocalyptic Hadiths in Dabiq

Issue 1: The Return of the Khalifah

Abu Hurayrah reported that Allah’s messenger said, ‘The Hour will not be established until the Romans land at al-A’maq or Dabiq. 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. The 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. Then they will conquer Constantinople. Whole they are dividing the war boot, having hung their swords on olive trees, Shaytan will shout, ‘The [false] Messiah has followed after your families [who were left behind].’ So they will leave [for their families], but Shaytan’s claim is false. When they arrive to Sham he comes out. Then while they are preparing for battle and filing their ranks, the prayer is called. So ‘Isa Ibn Maryam will descend and lead them. When the enemy of Allah sees him, he will melt until he perished, but he kills him with his own hand, and then shows them his blood upon his spear. [Sahih Muslim].

Issue 2: The Flood—It’s either IS or the Flood

Allah’s Messenger said, ‘You will invade the Arabian Peninsula and Allah will enable you to conquer it. You will invade Persia, and Allah will enable you to conquer it. You will then invade Rome, and Allah will enable you to conquer it. Then you will fight the Dajjal, and Allah will enable you to conquer him.’ [Sahih Muslim].

Issue 3: A Call to Hijrah

Abdullah Ibn Amr said that Allah’s Messenger said, ‘There will be Hijrah after Hijrah. The best people on earth will be those who keep to the land of Ibrahim’s Hijrah. Then there will remain on the earth the worst of its people. Their lands will cast them out, Allah will hate them, and the fire with gather them together with the apes and swine. [Hasan—Reported by Imam Ahmad, Abu Dawud, and al-Hakim].

Issue 4: The Failed Crusade: Reflections on the Final Crusade

Allah’s Messenger said, ‘You will have a treaty of security with the Romans until you both fight an enemy beyond them. And you will be victorious, you will gain war booty, and you will achieve such without losses. Thereafter you will return until you lodge at a pastureland full of rocky mounds. A man from the Roman Christians will then raise the cross. He will say, ‘The cross has prevailed!’ A man from the Muslims will then say, ‘Rather Allah has prevailed,’ and then he will angrily rise and crush the cross which is
not at a distance from him. Then the Romans will betray the treaty by rising against the breaker of the cross and striking his neck. The Muslims will then rise and rush to their arms. They will then battle. Allah will bless this party of Muslims with shahadah. The Romans will say to the Roman leader, ‘We are sufficient for you against the Arabs.’ They will gather for the Malhamah (the grand battle before the Hour). They will come for you under eighty banners, with each banner there will be twelve thousand people. [Sahih: reported by Imam Ahmad, Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah, and Ibn Hibban on the authority of Dhi Maikhmar].”

Issue 5: Remaining & Expanding

Ibn Mas’ud narrated that Rasulullah said, ‘If there were not left except a day from the dunya, Allah would lengthen that day to send forth on it a man from my family whose name matches my Name [Muhammad] and whose father’s name matches my father’s name [Abdullah]. He will fill the earth with justice and fairness as it was filled with opposition and tyranny’ [Sahih: Reported by Abu Dawud].

Issue 6: Al-Qaidah of Waziristian

Anas Ibn Malik narrated that Rasulullah said, ‘Prior to the Dajjal there will be deceptive years in which the truthful person is belied, the liar is believed, the trustworthy is accused of treachery, the treacherous person is trusted, and the ruwaybidah speaks.’ It was said to him, ‘What is the ruwaybidah?’ He said, ‘The fuwaysiq (worthless fasiq) who speaks concerning the affairs of the general public.’ [Hasan: Reported by Imam Ahmad and others].

Issue 7: From Hypocrisy to Apostasy-The Extinction of the Grey-Zone

The Hour will not be established until seventy thousand from the children of Ishaq attack Constantinople” Abu Hurayrah said, “The prophet said, ‘Have you heard of a city [Constantinople] a side of which is on the land and a side of which is on the sea?’ They said, ‘Yes, o Rasulullah.’ He Said, ‘The Hour will not be established until seventy thousand from the Children of Ishaq attack it. When they’ve reached it and camped, they do not fight with arms nor do they shoot arrows. They say ‘la ilaha illallah wallahu akbar. And thus one side of the city falls. They say ‘la ilaha illallah wallahu akbar a second time, and thus the other side falls. They say a third time, ‘la ilaha illallah wallahu akbar, so a break is made for them, and thus they enter the city and collect ghanimah. While they are dividing the ghanimah, a shout reaches them saying ‘The Dajjal has emerged.’ So they leave everything and return. [Sahih Muslim].
Issue 8: Shariah Alone Will Rule Africa

Abdullah Ibn Hawalah said, “Allah’s Messenger said, ‘You will be granted conquest over Sham, Rome, and Persia, until one of you will possess such and such number of camels, such and such number of cows, and such and such number of sheep, to the extent if one were to be given a hundred dinars, he would be discontent with it.’ He then placed his hand on my head and said, ‘O Ibn Hawalah, if you see that the Khilafah has come to the Holy Land [Sham], then the earthquakes, tribulations, and great matters have approached. The Hour will be closer that day to the people than this hand of mine from your head.” {Sahih: Reported by Imam Ahmad, Abu Dawudd, and al-Hakim}.

Issue 9: They Plot and Allah Plots

Adullah Ibn Mas’ud said, ‘The Last Hour will not be established until inheritance is not divided and booty is not rejoiced over.’ The he said, while pointing to Sham,’ An enemy will gather against the people of Islam and the people of Islam will gather against them.’ He was asked, ‘You mean the Romans?’ He replied, ‘Yes, and there will be a severe retreat. The Muslims will prepare a detachment for fighting unto death that will not return but victorious. They will fight until night will intervene between them; both sides will return without being victorious and the detachment will be wiped out. The Muslims will again prepare a detachment for fighting unto death that will not return but victorious. They will fight until night will intervene between them; both sides will return without being victorious, and the detachment will be wiped out. The Muslims will again prepare a detachment for fighting unto death that will not return but victorious. They will fight until night comes upon them; both sides will return without being victorious and the detachment will be wiped out. On the fourth day, the remnants of the people of Islam will arise and fight them and Allah will bring defeat upon the enemy. They will fight such a fight the like of which will not be seen (or which has not been seen), so much so that if a bird were to pass through their areas, it would fall dead before passing them. Thereafter, paternal relatives will count each other and find that after being one hundred, only one man is left from them. So what booty can be rejoiced over! And what inheritance can be divided! While they are in this condition, they will hear of a danger greater than this. A cry will reach them, ‘The Dajjal has taken your place among your families.’ They will then abandon what is in their hands, advance, and dispatch ten horsemen as a scouting party. Rasulullah said, ‘I know their names, the names of their fathers, and the colors of their horses. They will be the best horsemen on the face of the Earth on that day or amongst the best horsemen on the face of the Earth on that day’ [Sahih Mutslim].

Issue 10: The Law of Allah or the Laws of Man

Allah’s Messenger recited, {When the victory of Allah has come and the conquest, and you see the people entering into the religion of Allah in multitudes…} [An Nasr: 1-2]. He then said, ‘Indeed, they will leave it in multitudes just as they entered into it in multitudes’ [Reported by ad-Darimi and al-Hakim from Abu Hurayrah; Al-Hakim and
Allah’s Messenger said, ‘Indeed, what I fear most for my Ummah are the misguiding imams. And the Hour will not be established until tribes from my Ummah join the mushrikin and until tribes from my Ummah worship idols. And there will be in my Ummah thirty liars of who claim to be prophets. And I am the last of the prophets. There is no prophet after me. And there will always be a party of my Ummah manifest upon the truth not harmed by those who oppose them until there comes the command of Allah’ [Sahih: Reported by Abu Dawud, at-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Majah from Thawban].

Issue 11: From the Battle of Al-Ahzab to the War of Coalitions

Allah’s Messenger said, ‘Prior to the Hour there will be days in which Knowledge will be lifted away and Ignorance will descend [Upon the people]’ [Reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim from Abu Musa].

Jubayr Ibn Nufayr reported that Abud-Darda reported that he as with Allah’s Messenger when he looked up towards the sky and said, ‘A time will come soon when knowledge is taken away from the people until they are no longer able to grasp any of it.’ Ziyad Ibn Labid al-Ansari said, ‘How will it be taken away from us while we have read the Qur’an, for by Allah, we will read it and have our women and children read it.’ He Said, ‘May your mother bereave you O Ziyad! I used to count you from the fuqaha of al-Madinah. Are not the Tawrah and Injil with the Jews and Christians? What have their books availed them?’ Jubary then met Ubadah Ibn as-Samit and said to him, ‘Have you not heard what your brother Abud-Darda says?’ He then informed him of what Abud-Dara said. Ubadah said, ‘Abud-Darda spoke the truth. If you like, I will inform you of the first knowledge that will be taken from the people—Khushu. A time will come soon in which you enter a grand masjid and will not find a single person with khushu. [Hasan: Reported by at-Tirmidhi and others].

Issue 12: Just Terror

Allah’s Messenger said, ‘The Euphrates is on the verge of uncovering a mountain of gold. He who is present there should not take anything from it’ [Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim from Abu Hurayrah].

In another narration he said, ‘The Hour will not be established until the Euphrates uncovers a mountain of gold over which the people will fight. Ninety-nine out of each hundred wil be killed, but every man amongst them will say, “Perhaps I myself will survive”’ [Reported by Muslim from Abu Hurayrah.]

In another narration, he said, ‘The Euphrates is on the verge of uncovering a mountain of gold and when the people hear of it they will proceed towards it. The people who are there will say, ‘If we allow these people to take some of it, they will take it all away.’ So they will fight and ninety-nine out of one hundred will be killed.’ [Reported by Muslim from Ubayy Ibn Ka’b].
Rasulullah said, ‘The Dajjal will be followed by seventy thousand Jews from Asbahan [Isfahan] wearing talisman [shoulder-draped shawls]’ [Reported by Muslim from Anas].’
APPENDIX B: Dabiq on Jesus

History repeats itself by Allah’s divine decree…There is no escape from this divine decree. It must happen and certainly will…. the bulk of all jihad was against the cross-worshipping Romans with Sham playing an important role in all the wars between the Muslims and crusaders. And this will be the case until their taghut cross is broken by the Masih Isa. As this final crusade carries on and prior to its short pause followed by crusader treachery (whenever that occurs), it is important to reflect over a number of matters.382

A number of the narrations concerning the events that take place in Sham as the Hour draws closer include the mention of Isa Ibn Maryam…These narrations typically speak of the final battles that the Muslims will engage in with the Christians and Jews, including the confrontation in which the Muslims are led by Isa against the Dajjal. If Allah had willed, He could have left the Muslims to witness this epic engagement under the leadership of an ordinary man from amongst them. Instead, He decreed that it would be a Prophet…who would deal the decisive blow to the Dajjal and his followers, the cursed Jews, who have a history of betraying and even killing the prophets of Allah. It would be one of the very Prophets whom they tried, but failed; to kill that would slay their ‘awaited king.”’’ “Thus, the return of Isa would immediately be followed, not by peace, but by a confrontation with the enemies of Allah. It would be a fitting end to the legacy of His Prophets on the earth, a legacy that was filled with Prophets who stood for the truth and did not back down in the face of the disbelievers’ threats.383

It is clear then that salam (peace) is not the basis of the word Islam, the sword will continue to be drawn, raised, and swung until Isa kills the Dajjal (the Antichrist) and abolishes the jizyah. Thereafter, kufr and its tyranny will be destroyed Islam and its justice will prevail on the entire Earth.384

Eventually, the grayzone will become extinct and there will be no place for grayish calls and movements. There will only be the camp of Iman vs the camp of kufr. Then, when Isa descends, breaks the cross, and abolishes the jizya, there will not be any place for the camp of kufr to exist on Earth, not even as humbled dhimmi subjects amongst the Muslims in the camp of truth…Therefore, the Beast will appear and mark the hypocrites who remained as individuals hidden in the camp of truth, thereby bringing an end to hypocrisy of the individual level after the Malahim had finished hypocrisy on the level of calls and movements…385

382 Dabiq 4:32
383 Dabiq 5:3
384 Dabiq 7:23
385 Dabiq 7:66
He explained that the Muslims would not cease to fight parties of the kuffar until Isa descends and leads the Muslim armies. He said, ‘Indeed, fighting the kuffar, hijrah, and jihad will remain until the establishment of the Hour.’ Allah’s Messenger said, ‘Hijrah will not cease to exist until repentance ceases to be accepted, and repentance will not cease to be accepted until the sun rises from the West’ [Reported by Abu Dawud from Mu’awiyah]…He also said, ‘There will not cease to exist a group of my nation fighting upon the truth, manifest until the Day of Judgment. Then Isa, Son of Maryam, will descend, and the leader will say, ‘Come and lead us in prayer.’ So he will say, ‘No. You are leaders over one another as an honor from Allah for this nation’ [Reported by Muslim from Jabir].

The severe strangeness has been lifted. The only strangeness to confront was that of the crusader alliance, the Sahwah alliance, and the Safawi alliance. But this strangeness was welcome, as it was the key to shahadah and Jannah. O Allah, what comes to us of good is from You alone; You have no partner; To You is due all praise and thanks. O Allah, preserve the great blessing of the Khilafah for us until Prophet Isa descends to lead us. O Allah, make us from Your thankful slaves.

May Allah united him and his cousin in Paradise and allow us to follow them. May Allah look after his family and protect his children in the shade of the Khilafah, so that they only live by tawhid and so that they are amongst the ranks of Prophet Isa when he descends to lead the armies of the Muslims.

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386 Dabiq 9:24
387 Dabiq 11:29
388 Dabiq 12:56
APPENDIX C: Dabiq on al-Malhamah al-Kubra:

Sham is the Land of Malahim: “Then, these nuzza gathered in Sham, the land of malahim and the land of al-Malhamah al-Kubra. Allah’s Messenger has informed of battle that will occur in places within Sham and its vicinity, such as al-Ghutah, Damascus, Dabiq (or al-A’maq), the Euphrates River, and Constantinople…And he linked this blessed land with many of the events related to al-Mashi, al-Mahdi, and the Dajjal.389

So those who left their tribes…fathered together in the land of malahim shortly before the occurrence of al-Malhamah al-Kubra, announce their enmity and hatred for the cross worshippers, the apostates, their crosses, their borders, and their ballot boxes, and pledged allegiance to the Khilafah, promising to die defending it.390

As mentioned in the introduction of our first issue, the name of our magazine was taken from the area named Dabiq in the northern countryside of Halab, due to the significant role it will play during the events of al-Malhamah al-Kubra (The Grand Battle) against the crusaders.” “We ask Allah to place us in the camp of believers on the day of al-Malhamah and keep us firm until he grants us either victory or shahadah.391

After this discussion and as we approach al-Malhamah al-Kubra (the greatest battle before the Hour)—whenever its time comes by Allah’s decree—it is interesting to note that slavery has been mentioned as one of the signs of the Hour as well as one of the causes behind al-Malhamah al-Kubra. Rasulullah mentioned that one of the signs of the Hour was that ‘the slave girl gives birth to her master.’ This was reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayrah and by Muslim on the authority of Umar.392

Then the Romans will commit treachery by raising the cross and killing a Muslim. This will lead to the continuation of the war between the Muslims and the Romans. They will demand access to those who enslaved some of them or the former captives themselves who accepted Islam so as to fight them. This enslavement will have taken place either before the signing of the truce or after the treachery, and Allah knows best. These battles all lead up to the final, greatest, and bloodiest battle—al-Malhamah al-Kubra—between the Muslims and the Romans prior to the appearance of the Dajjal and the descent of al-Mashi. This battle ends the era of the Roman Christians, as the Muslims will then advance upon Constantinople and thereafter Rome, to conquer the two cities

389 Dabiq 3:9
390 Dabiq 3:11
391 Dabiq 3:15
392 Dabiq 4:15
and raise the flag of the Khilafah over them.\textsuperscript{393}

He expresses without any doubt that if the mujahidin hold on to their covenant with their Lord while relying upon Him alone, then this weak, pitiful, and abortive crusade will be the final one encompassing the eventual truce and crusader treachery leading up to al-Malhamah al-Kubra, and Allah knows best.\textsuperscript{394}

One with sincerity will realize there is no grayzone in this crusade against the Islamic State, and that the world has split into two encampments, one for the people of faith, the other for the people of kufr, all in preparation for the final Malhamah.” “Finally, do not forget that Allah is with the Muslims and will never abandon them to His enemies. And the Islamic State will remain until its banner flies over Rome.\textsuperscript{395}

As the world progresses towards al-Malhamah al-Kubra, the option to stand on the sidelines as a mere observer is being lost. As those with hearts disease by hypocrisy and bid’ah are driven towards the camp of kufr those with a mustard seed of sincerity and Sunnah are driven towards the camp of Iman. Muslims in the crusader countries will find themselves driven to abandon their homes for a place to live in the Khilafah, as the crusaders increase persecution against Muslims living in Western lands so as to force them into a tolerable sect of apostasy in the name of “Islam” before forcing them into blatant Christianity and democracy.\textsuperscript{396}

In his words there is a summary of this final plot of the crusaders and their apostate allies before the major malhamah. First, the crusaders have become too weak to wage their own wars. This is due to the blessed operations of September 11\textsuperscript{th} and the subsequent jihad in both Afghanistan and Iraq. They are too weak financially, militarily, and psychologically to fight another war, although there is no doubt that they will eventually fight the Muslims at Dabiq after the crusaders’ betrayal of an impending truce.\textsuperscript{397}

The crusaders will ultimately find they cannot face the Islamic State except directly, fact-to-face, or else—due to their nonstop bleeding—the crusaders will be forced to disengage from their war against the Muslims until the time decreed by Allah for al-Malhamah al-Kubra.\textsuperscript{398}

\textsuperscript{393} Dabiq 4:35  
\textsuperscript{394} Dabiq 4:37  
\textsuperscript{395} Dabiq 4:44  
\textsuperscript{396} Dabiq 7:66  
\textsuperscript{397} Dabiq 9:57  
\textsuperscript{398} Dabiq 9:59
You know the importance of Dabiq towards the future of Islam, the Malahim, and al-Malhamah al-Kubra. How can the Muslim support the mujahidin in Dabiq now?399

Our role model and noble Messenger praised Dabiq very much, and this was mentioned in a number of authentic narrations. Dabiq is the camp of the Muslims during the great battle (al-Malhamah al-Kubra). But every Muslim who cannot come and wants to perform jihad and support the Islamic State can do so where he may be, just as he was ordered by the Khalifah in his latest address. A simple supplication from our Muslim brothers practicing ribat is in itself support—a great support for us. Any advance of the Khilafah against the Nusayriyyah and Rafidah, any manifestation of unity through new bay’at to the Khilafah, and any attack against the supporters of the Sahwah—the crusaders and Al Salul—strengthens the mujahidin in Dabiq. May Allah facilitate for the armies of the Khilafah to liberate Dabiq.400

And nothing changes for the Islamic State, as it will continue to pronounce takfir upon the Jews, the Christians, the pagans, and the apostates from the Rafidah, the Nusayriyyah, the Sahwah, and the tawaghit. It will continue to wage war against the apostates until they repent from apostasy. It will continue to wage war against the pagans until they accept Islam. It will continue to wage war against the Jewish state until the Jews hide behind their gharqad trees. And it will continue to wage war against the Christians until the truce is decreed sometime before the Malhamah. Thereafter, the slave markets will commence in Rome by Allah’s power and might. May Allah continue to break and shatter the ranks of the kafir coalitions and alliances all over the earth.401

399 Dabiq 9:72
400 Dabiq 9:73
401 Dabiq 12:46
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