

# Islamic Eschatology: Research Notes

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A work in progress, all errors, omissions and typos my own.

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# Islamic Eschatology: the Signs of the Times:

## The Minor and Major Signs of the Islamic Day of Judgment

### Minor Signs before the Day

The following minor signs of Day have been mentioned in ahadīth and collected from various sources:

- The moon will be split.
- Husbands will obey their wives and disobey their mothers.
- Leadership and political power will be given to those who are unqualified.
- People will honor and respect oppressors out of fear of being harmed.
- Alcohol will be consumed openly.
- Singing and dancing women will become commonplace.
- Later generations will begin criticizing and speaking ill of their pious predecessors.
- Time will pass more quickly.
- A red hurricane will come and some people will be drawn into the ground.
- Stones will rain down from the skies.
- Lies and lying will be considered to be an art.
- Men will lie with men, and women will lie with women.
  
- Many imposters will claim to be Imam Mahdi. The genuine Mahdi will be circumambulating the Kaaba, a few pious people will recognize him and plead with him to become their ruler and will give him allegiance. At this time a voice will come down from the skies and all those who are present will hear the voice say that this person is the Caliph of Allah and that he is Imam Mahdi.

### The major signs of Day

The major signs of qiyāmah commence on the appearance of Imam Mahdi. There are many of them, and the details of future history concerning the wars between the Mahdi, the Dajjal, and the descent of Jesus to earth are varied. The accounts given in Abu Musab al-Suri's *Global Islamic Resistance Call* and by ISIS in *Dabiq* magazine appear to be the ones of significant strategic value to western observers.

Here are a few other signs of interest, concerning arising from the dead, extraordinary signs in the skies, a beast with supernatural power, and a final trumpet call preceding resurrection – each one echoing one of the apocalyptic signs in the Christian New Testament:

- There will be a pious man in Madinah who will debate with Dajjal. The latter will go into a rage and kill this pious person and bring him to life again. Dajjal will ask him: "Now do you believe that I am god?" He will reply: "Now I am more convinced that you are Dajjal." Dajjal will try to hit him but will be unable to do so, nor will he be able to influence him in any way.
  
- A very long night will come. It will be so long that travelers will become restless, children will become tired and weary on account of sleeping too much, and grazing animals will begin clamoring to go to the fields to graze. However, dawn will not break. Everyone will become restless out of fear and anxiety. Once this night equals three nights, the sun will appear very dimly from the western horizon. Once the sun reaches the position that it normally takes at

mid-day, it will begin returning to the west and it will set as it normally does. Thereafter, it will continue rising normally according to its normal brightness.

- An animal of strange appearance and shape will appear and begin conversing with people. This animal will travel the entire earth very swiftly. It will have the staff of Moses with which it will draw an illuminated line across the foreheads of the believers. The result of this will be that the believers' faces will become illuminated. As for the infidels, it will stamp them on their noses or necks with the ring of Solomon, whereby their faces will become dark. Once this animal completes this task, it will disappear.
- On the morning of a Friday on the 10th of Muharram, the trumpet will be blown. Initially, the sound will be soft. Gradually it will get louder until everyone will die out of panic and horror. The land and the skies will be blown into smithereens and the entire universe will be destroyed. The time span from the rising of the sun from the west till the blowing of the trumpet will be 120 years. After this, the day of resurrection will commence.

## Islamic Eschatology: key passages and their contemporary uses:

The Quran is the central scripture of Islam, and is considered the actual Word of God.

Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and the Christians, and those Sabaeans, whoso believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness -- their wage awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them; neither shall they sorrow.

*Quran 2: 62*, in the Arberry translation.

For the original Arabic and other versions, see the *Quranic Arabic Corpus*:

<http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=2&verse=62>

Chapter 75 of the *Quran* is titled Qiyama, the Resurrection. It reads as follows in the Arberry version:

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

No! I swear by the Day of Resurrection. No! I swear by the reproachful soul. What, does man reckon We shall not gather his bones? Yes indeed; We are able to shape again his fingers. Nay, but man desires to continue on as a libertine, asking, 'When shall be the Day of Resurrection?' But when the sight is dazed and the moon is eclipsed, and the sun and moon are brought together, upon that day man shall say, 'Whither to flee?' No indeed; not a refuge! Upon that day the recourse shall be to thy Lord. Upon that day man shall be told his former deeds and his latter; nay, man shall be a clear proof against himself, even though he offer his excuses.

Move not thy tongue with it to hasten it; Ours it is to gather it, and to recite it. So, when We recite it, follow thou its recitation. Then Ours it is to explain it. No indeed; but you love the hasty world, and leave be the Hereafter. Upon that day faces shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord; and upon that day faces shall be scowling, thou mightest think the Calamity has been wreaked on them. No indeed; when it reaches the clavicles and it is said, 'Who is an enchanter?' and he thinks that it is the parting and leg is intertwined with leg, upon that day unto thy Lord shall be the driving.

For he confirmed it not, and did not pray, but he cried it lies, and he turned away, then he went to his household arrogantly. Nearer to thee and nearer than nearer to thee and nearer! What, does man reckon he shall be left to roam at will? Was he not a sperm-drop spilled? Then he was a blood-clot, and He created and formed, and He made of him two kinds, male and female.

What, is He not able to quicken the dead?

The complete AJ Arberry translation of the Quran is available in .pdf here:

<https://ia601706.us.archive.org/20/items/QuranAJArberry/Quran-A%20J%20Arberry.pdf>

While the *Quran* is regarded by Muslims as the Word of God, it is supplemented in Muslim life by the "traditions of the Prophet" -- *hadith*, plural *ahadith* -- reported remarks made by the Prophet and passed down through lines of transmission (*isnad*), which are variously evaluated as strong, weak, etc.

One significant cluster of *ahadith* regarding the end times, often quoted by Al-Qaida in their recruitment propaganda, has to do with a victorious army with black banners marching from Khorasan, a historic area including parts of Iran and Afghanistan, to Jerusalem, al-Quds.

Ali Soufan, the Arabic-speaking FBI agent interrogating the Al-Qaida terrorist Abu Jandal, reports one session in his book *The Black Banners: The Inside Story of 9/11 and the War Against Al-Qaeda*. Abu Jandal, full of himself, is speaking:

"The hadith says," and he began quoting: "If you see the black banners coming from Khurasan, join that army, even if you have to crawl over ice; no power will be able to stop them—"

Abu Jandal paused for a second to catch his breath, but before he could finish the hadith, I continued it for him: "-- and they will finally reach Baitul Maqdis [Jerusalem], where they will erect their flags."

Soufan comments:

I was to hear that reputed hadith from many al-Qaeda members I interrogated. It was one of al-Qaeda's favorites.

Khurasan is a term for a historical region spanning northeastern and eastern Iran and parts of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and northwestern Pakistan. Because of the hadith, jihadists believe that this is the region from which they will inflict a major defeat against their enemies — in the Islamic version of Armageddon. Bin Laden's 1996 declaration of war against the United States — a main text for al-Qaeda members — ends with the dateline "Friday, August 23, 1996, in the Hindu Kush, Afghanistan." It's not a coincidence that bin Laden made al-Qaeda's flag black; he also regularly cited the hadith and referenced Khurasan when recruiting, motivating, and fundraising. Al-Qaeda operatives I interrogated were often convinced that, by joining al-Qaeda, they were fulfilling the words of the Prophet.

It is an indication of how imperfectly we know our enemy that to most people in the West, and even among supposed al-Qaeda experts, the image of the black banners means little...

It is important to note that the most accomplished jihadist strategist, Abu Musab al-Suri, ended his 1,600-page masterwork, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, with a hundred-page treatise on the *ahadith* concerning the end times.

Jean-Pierre Filiu, the French diplomat and scholar who wrote *Apocalypse in Islam*, tells us:

There is nothing in the least theoretical about this exercise in apocalyptic exegesis. It is meant instead as a guide for action.

Another highly significant hadith is quoted in the *Charter of Hamas*, the Islamic Resistance Movement terrorist group in Gaza. It is known as the Gharqad Tree *hadith*:

... the Islamic Resistance Movement looks forward to fulfill the promise of Allah no matter how long it takes because the Prophet of Allah (saas) says:

The Last Hour would not come until the Muslims fight against the Jews and the Muslims would kill them, and until the Jews would hide themselves behind a stone or a tree and a stone or a tree would say, Muslim or Servant of Allah there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him; but the tree of Gharqad would not say it, for it is the tree of the Jews (Bukhari and Muslim).

It is noteworthy that Bin Laden quoted this *hadith*, while the IS "caliphate" also references it in the 2nd issue of *Dabiq*:

As for the massacres taking place in Gaza against the Muslim men, women, and children, then the Islamic State will do everything within its means to continue striking down every apostate who stands as an obstacle on its path towards Palestine. It is not the manner of the Islamic State to throw empty, dry, and hypocritical words of condemnation and condolences like the Arab tawaghit do in the UN and Arab League. Rather, its actions speak louder than its words and it is only a matter of time and patience before it reaches Palestine to fight the barbaric jews and kill those of them hiding behind the gharqad trees – the trees of the jews.

These apocalyptic *ahadith*, used respectively by al-Qaida and Hamas, demonstrate the significance of "end times" thinking in major groups of current concern to the United States and its allies.

The concerns of Hamas are local to the Israeli-Palestinian region, those of al-Qaida are explicitly global, while those of the IS "caliphate" have moved to the stage of naming a Caliph, the presumed head of all Muslims everywhere.

The IS use of a hadith about Dabiq in Syria, the site of a significant end times battle, will be recounted in **Case Study: Dabiq magazine**.

There is only one step farther than the proclamation of a caliphate, and that would be the proclamation of a Mahdi, the definitive end times figure of both Sunni and Shia Islam. Such a proclamation, if accepted by a large segment of the Muslim world, would further inflame the already heated Middle East, and whatever further outposts it reached.

It is therefore important to understand the explicitly eschatological figure of the Mahdi, and the qualitative difference between jihadist and Mahdist movements. Timothy Furnish sums up this distinction in the opening paragraph of his 2005 book, *Holiest Wars: Islamic Mahdis, Their Jihads, and Osama bin Laden*:

Islamic messianic insurrections are qualitatively different from mere fundamentalist ones such as bedevil the world today, despite their surface similarities. In fact, Muslim messianic movements are to fundamentalist uprisings what nuclear weapons are to conventional ones: triggered by the same detonating agents, but far more powerful in scope and effect.

Comparisons are hard to make, and Furnish is undoubtedly trying to catch the attention of a word -- with its policy-makers -- that has for too long ignored the threat of Mahdism.

Ali A Allawi, the Iraqi Minister of Defense after the fall of Saddam Hussein, spoke on Mahdist movements in Iraq at the Jamestown Foundation a few years back.

In the Q&A session which followed his talk, a questioner mentioned his hunch that memories of the Taiping Rebellion were behind the Chinese government's fierce response to the group of qi-gong practitioners known as Falun Gong. Before the apocalyptic Taiping movement was finally crushed, somewhere between 20 and 30 million Chinese were dead.

Allawi responded that similarly, the reason the Iraqi government took such fierce action against a small Mahdist uprising near Najaf — an incident perhaps best compared in US terms with the siege of the Branch Davidians in Waco, TX — was that they remembered the Babi movement in their own part of the world, and the tens of thousands who died back in the 1850s, around the same time as the Taiping in China.

The Taiping movement, leading to the deaths of 20+ million people, took place a century and a half ago, and without the global reach of the internet, Facebook, Twitter and so forth - - social media tools at which the jihadists, and ISIS in particular, are extremely adept.

It has taken a long while, but even the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs, Martin Dempsey, now admits that we are facing an "end times" motivated enemy:

This is an organisation that has an apocalyptic, end-of-days strategic vision which will eventually have to be defeated.

So what is that vision, and how can we recognise the signs of apocalyptic arousal when they are present, but "coded" in a way that doesn't fit our cultural expectations?

Wherever you see a reference to the Mahdi, the Dajjal or Muslim antichrist, the return of the Prophet Isa (ie Jesus), the place names Khorasan or Dabiq, or an army with black banners, you may be certain you are seeing an end times reference.

In addition to the ahadith, you can generally spot an apocalyptic jihadist movement by its black banners. Now commonly spoken of as "ISIS flags", they have been used with clear eschatological implications by al-Qaida -- not just in Afghanistan, but even in Africa, where the late American jihadist Omar Hammami confirmed their apocalyptic relevance.



They come in various shapes and sizes: in this particular image, the flag in the middle is that of Harakat Sham al-Islam, flanked by the flags and fighters of ISIS and Jabhat an-Nusra.

Since this photo was taken, the "unity" between ISIS and Jabhat an-Nusra has collapsed, with ISIS proclaiming itself the beginnings of a renewed caliphate under Caliph Ibrahim, aka Abu Bakr al -Baghdadi, and Jabhat still giving allegiance to al-Qaida and its boss, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

In another *hadith*, the Prophet predicted that sects and schisms would proliferate in Islam:

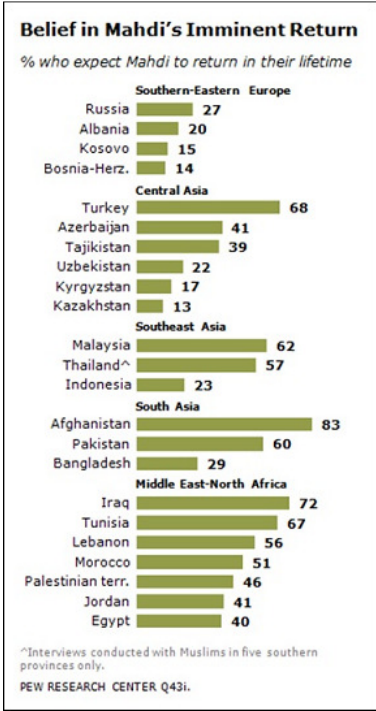
It was reported from ‘Awf ibn Maalik who said: the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said:

“The Jews were divided into seventy-one sects, one of which is in Paradise and seventy are in the Fire. The Christians were divided into seventy-two sects, seventy-one of which are in the Fire and one is in Paradise. By the One in Whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, my Ummah will be divided into seventy-three sects, one of which will be in Paradise and seventy-two will be in the Fire.” It was said, O Messenger of Allaah, who are they? He said, “Al-Jamaa’ah.” [Sunan Ibn Maajah, no. 3982]

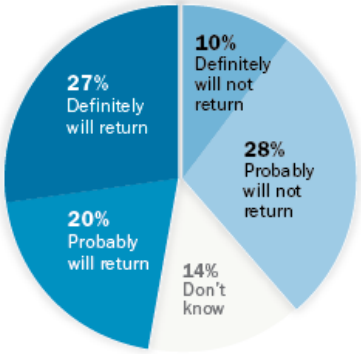
Those who view Islam as one monolithic entity should bear this hadith in mind. Arguably, the odds of any given version of Islam being the one that merits paradise is 72 to 1 against.

Hopefully, the reader will by now have understood that the "end times" orientation within jihadist movements is pervasive and dangerous. Here's the result of Pew polling research on how widespread the expectation of the Mahdi is among Muslims across various nations, left, side by side with Pew's chart showing the percentage of Christians in the US who believe Christ will return within the next 40 years:





**Will Jesus Return Soon?**  
 Percent of U.S. Christians who say Jesus will return to earth in the next 40 years



Pew Research Center survey, April 21-26, 2010, Q.56aF1. Full question wording: I'm going to read you a list of things that may or may not happen in the next 40 years. Please tell me how likely you think it is... that Jesus Christ will return to earth. Do you think this will definitely happen, will probably happen, will probably NOT happen, or will definitely not happen?

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Pew Research Center

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there are Christian "end times" believers who view Islamic "end times" beliefs through the lens of their own apocalyptic narrative. Joel Richardson, author of *Mideast Beast: The Scriptural Case for an Islamic Antichrist*, argues the Islamic Mahdi will be the Antichrist of the Christian end times. Richardson says:

Unless a supernatural man bursts forth from the sky in glory, there is absolutely nothing that the world needs to worry about with regard to Christian end-time beliefs. Christians are called to passively await their defender. They are not attempting to usher in His return.

The rhetoric of retired US general Jerry Boykin, now a Christian minister, starts at that point:

The Lord is a warrior and in Revelation 19 is says when he comes back, he's coming back as what? A warrior. A mighty warrior leading a mighty army, riding a white horse with a blood-stained white robe ... I believe that sword he'll be carrying when he comes back is an AR-15.

And just as authors such as Joel Richardson and Joel Rosenberg address Islamic eschatology from a viewpoint steeped in its Christian equivalent, Islamic eschatologists have been known to read and comment on Christian eschatology.

Thus Sheikh Safar al-Hawali -- a Saudi scholar whom bin Laden was known to read -- in his book *Day of Wrath*, predicted that the armies of Jihad would have conquered Jerusalem in end times battle in 2012 -- basing his calculations in part on such Christian materials as Hal Lindsey's 1970s apocalyptic best-seller, *The Late, Great Planet Earth*.

## Case Study: Dabiq magazine:

An example of the eschatological rhetoric used by the Islamic "caliphate" in its English-language magazine *Dabiq*, aimed at convincing young and relatively ignorant western Muslim converts to travel to Syria and Iraq to join the "caliphate" and its jihad.

### **Dabiq, issue #1:**

A new caliphate's new magazine demands a new name — and on this occasion the name chosen carries a very specific end-times connotation:

As for the name of the magazine, then it is taken from the area named Dabiq in the northern countryside of Halab (Aleppo) in Sham. This place was mentioned in a hadith describing some of the events of the Malahim (what is sometimes referred to as Armageddon in English). One of the greatest battles between the Muslims and the crusaders will take place near Dabiq.

So there you have it in a nutshell — the IS caliphate announced their arrival with the first issue of a magazine named specifically for an impending battle associated with Armageddon.

To give those they seek to recruit to the cause more detail, one hadith has been used repeatedly by the newly formed "caliphate" of ISIS to give an "end times" spin to their jihad mentions. It mentions:

- The Hour -- the end times
- the Romans -- the Western forces
- Dabiq -- scene of a historic battle and more significantly location of a future, end times battle, to be fought in "Sham" ie greater Syria, where the Great Battle, al-Malhamah al-Kubra, comparable to Christian Armageddon, will take place
- Shatyan -- Satan
- The [false] Messiah -- the Muslim antichrist known as the Dajjal, and
- Isa Ibn Maryam -- Jesus son of Mary, whom Muslims believe will return to kill the Dajjal and assist the Mahdi, Islam's principal end times eschatological figure

The extended hadith reads as follows:

Abu Hurayrah reported that Allah's Messenger (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said,

"The Hour will not be established until the Romans land at al-A'maq or Dabiq (two places near each other in the northern countryside of Halab). Then an army from al-Madinah of the best people on the earth at that time will leave for them.

When they line up in ranks, the Romans will say, 'Leave us and those who were taken as prisoners from amongst us so we can fight them.' The Muslims will say, 'Nay, by Allah, we will not abandon our brothers to you.' So they will fight them.

Then one third of them will flee; Allah will never forgive them. One third will be killed; they will be the best martyrs with Allah. And one third will conquer them; they will never be afflicted with fitnah. Then they will conquer Constantinople.

While they are dividing the war booty, 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 ('alayhis-Salam) will descend and lead them.

When the enemy of Allah sees him, he will melt as salt melts in water. If he were to leave him, he would melt until he perished, but he kills him with his own hand, and then shows them his blood upon his spear" [Sahih Muslim].

The editorial concludes:

According to the hadith, the area will play a historical role in the battles leading up to the conquests of Constantinople, then Rome. Presently, Dabiq is under the control of crusader backed sahwat, close to the warfront between them and the Khilafah.

May Allah purify Dabiq from the treachery of the sahwah and raise the flag of the Khilafah over its land. Amin.

Issue #2 adds little to the eschatological narrative, but issue 3 goes into considerable detail.

### **Dabiq, Issue #3:**

Hijrah is emigration for religious purposes, pilgrimage on a one-way ticket, and the archetypal Hijrah, that which was made by the Prophet and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622, gives the Islamic calendar its starting date.

The Islamic State dedicated the third issue of *Dabiq* to the topic of hijrah, viewed in the shade of the Prophet's hijrah as the emigration of Muslims from around the world to participate among the forces of the "caliphate" in the final jihad. The argument is remarkable for its coherent throughline:

Contemplate – may Allah have mercy upon you – the states that existed throughout history, both the Muslim states and the mushrik states. Were any of them established by the emigration of poor strangers from the East and the West, who then gathered in an alien land of war and pledged allegiance to an "unknown" man, in spite of the political, economic, military, media, and intelligence war waged by the nations of the world against their religion, their state, and their hijrah? And in spite of the fact that they did not have any common "nationality," ethnicity, language, or worldly interests, nor did they have any prior acquaintance!

This phenomenon is something that has never occurred in human history, except in the case of the Islamic State! And nothing like it will ever occur thereafter except in relation to it; and Allah knows best.

and:

But if you were to go to the frontlines of ar-Raqqah, al-Barakah, al-Khayr, Halab, etc., you would find the soldiers and the commanders to be of different colors, languages, and lands: the Najdi, the Jordanian, the Tunisian, the Egyptian, the Somali, the Turk, the Albanian, the Chechen, the Indonesian, the Russian, the European, the American and so on. They left their families and their lands to renew the state of the muwahhidin in Sham, and they had never known each other until they arrived in Sham!

Having stressed the uniqueness of the Islamic State in this way, the writer then makes it clear that this unique event is happening precisely because we are in the tune-up to the final battle:

I have no doubt that this state, which has gathered the bulk of the muhajirin [ie: those who have made hijrah] in Sham and has become the largest collection of muhajirin in the world, is a marvel of history that has only come about to pave the way for al-Malhamah al-Kubra (the grand battle prior to the Hour). And Allah knows best.

and:

And what a tremendous favor it is from Allah to guide one to the Islamic State and grant him companionship with its muhajirin, those who plunge into the malahim (the great battles prior to the Hour)!

Not surprisingly, therefore, significance is given to the location of the Islamic State in Greater Sham. A major section is headed:

Sham is the Land of Malahim

and in it, we read:

Then, these nuzza' gathered in Sham, the land of malahim and the land of al-Malhamah al-Kubra. Allah's Messenger (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) has informed of battles 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 (which is near Sham), as well as Baytul-Maqdis (Jerusalem), the gate of Lod, Lake Tiberius, the Jordan River, Mount Sinai, and so on.

The immediately following sentence, as Dr Furnish pointed out, contains the first explicit reference to the Mahdi in an issue of Dabiq:

And he (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) linked this blessed land with many of the events related to al-Masih, al-Mahdi, and the Dajjal.

The following hadith detailing the site of the final battle — compare Har Megiddo in Christian scripture — is then quoted:

Abud-Darda' (radiyallahu 'anh) said that Allah's Messenger (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, "Indeed the camp of the Muslims on the day of al-Malhamah al-Kubra will be in al-Ghutah, next to a city called Damascus, one of the best cities of Sham" [sahih – reported by Imam Ahmad, Abu Dawud, and al-Hakim].

The group of foreigners from around the world coming to al-Sham is also described as "strangers" — a term with its own reference both to the earliest companions and to the latest among fighters in the final battle:

Ibn Mas'ud (radiyallahu 'anh) said that the Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, "Verily Islam began as something strange, and it will return to being 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 Ahmad, ad-Darimi, and Ibn Majah, with a sahih isnad].

The earliest Muslims were strange because they were few among their fellow-tribespeople of Mecca, the latest because they are a comparatively small vanguard — a favorite term of bin Laden's — among all those hundreds of millions who today call themselves Muslims — but also and specifically because they come from "strange" lands.

But what does it mean, in a specifically Islamic and apocalyptic context, to be "strange" and "chosen" in this way? Another paragraph from Dabiq gives us further insight:

Shaykh Hamid at-Tuwayjiri (rahimahullah), in commenting on some of the narrations about the tribulations and battles in Sham, said, "In these narrations is evidence that the bulk of at-Ta'ifatul-Mansurah (the victorious group) will be in Sham near the end of times, because the Khilafah will be there. They will continue to be there clearly upon the truth until ..

I'll leave the "until" for later, and simply report some ahadith here that concern the "victorious group" and the "saved sect":

It was reported from 'Awf ibn Maalik who said: the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said:

"The Jews were divided into seventy-one sects, one of which is in Paradise and seventy are in the Fire. The Christians were divided into seventy-two sects, seventy-one of which are in the Fire and one is in Paradise. By the One in Whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, my Ummah will be divided into seventy-three sects, one of which will be in Paradise and seventy-two will be in the Fire." It was said, O Messenger of Allaah, who are they? He said, "Al-Jamaa'ah." [Sunan Ibn Maajah, no. 3982]

That's one of numerous variants on the same message. And another hadith connects the "victorious group" specifically with the "saved sect" thus:

They are in this world "The Victorious Group" [at-Taa'ifah al-Mansoorah] and in the hereafter "The Saved Sect". [al-Firqah an-Naajiyah]

Furthermore, Muhammad ibn al-Uthaymin, in his Methodology (Minhaaj) of Ahlus-Sunnah wa-l-Jamaa'ah makes the connection with the end times explicit:

There will always be a group of my Ummah victorious upon the truth, until the last of them fight against Ad-Dajjal.

Abu Dawud 3:11, cited in Tafsir Ibn Kathir: (abridged) Vol 9 p.88

The foreign fighters, then, will be strangers because foreigners, strange because they will be few compared to the masses of the indifferent and quiescent, select, victorious, saved, "on the truth" — they will be a "vanguard" and also a "remnant" — participating on the field of battle during the battles leading up to the final great Battle of the End Times.

Again, this is a powerful chord to strike in the hearts of the young, the uncritical — those who got in search of jihad in al-Sham, buying copies of *Islam for Dummies* before they leave their European and American homes..

So those who left their tribes — the best of Allah's slaves — rallied together with an imam and a jama'ah upon the path of Ibrahim. They gathered together in the land of malahim shortly before the occurrence of al-Malhamah al-Kubra, announced their enmity and hatred for the cross worshippers, the apostates, their crosses, their borders, and their ballotboxes, and pledged allegiance to the Khilafah, promising to die defending it.

There are two more matters in this first take on Dabiq issue 3 that I'd like to mention, one having to do with faith and the unseen, the other with something not unlike current dispensationalist notions of the Rapture.

As to faith, Dabiq notes:

Allah has praised the believers for their belief in the unseen, as He said, {They believe in the unseen} [Al-Baqarah: 3]. The companions of the Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) believed in both what they witnessed and what they could not see, for they believed in Allah and the Day of Judgment without seeing either of them, and they believed in the Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) having seen and witnessed him. The revelation would descend [upon him] in their company, and they would see the signs and witness the miracles.

*Dabiq* continues with more in this same line of ahadith, once again tying in the last days of the victorious group with the first days of the Companions and earliest generations of Islam:

The last part of this ummah believes in what the first part of the ummah believed in of the unseen, and believes in what the first part of the ummah believed in as eyewitnesses. This latter belief is their belief in the Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam), for they do not see the Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam), and because of that they've become the most wondrous people in faith, as reported [in the hadith] of Ibn 'Abbas (radiyallahu 'anhuma) that Allah's Messenger (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, 'The most wondrous people in faith are a people who come after me and believe in me without having seen me, and they attest to my truthfulness without having seen me. So they are my brothers' [reported by Imam Ahmad]" [Ma'ani al-Akhbar].

Once again, powerful and ancient memes are given a new and powerful interpretation and application.

The second point has to do with a divine force that lifts the righteous above the fray, so that only those who have earned some measure of divine wrath remain on earth — shades of the Rapture as described in the *Left Behind* series!

As you may recall, up above, I quoted:

They will continue to be there clearly upon the truth until ..

and said I would pick up the sentence later. The whole sentence reads:

They will continue to be there clearly upon the truth until Allah sends the pleasant breeze and it takes the soul of every person who has faith in his heart, as preceded in the sahih narrations that the Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, 'Until the command of Allah comes while they are upon that [condition]'" [Ithaful-Jama'ah].

This is certainly another strong apocalyptic meme — the physical and / or metaphysical safeguarding of the faithful few in a time of wrath and destruction. And *Dabiq* hammers it home repeatedly:

In another narration, "So it [the breeze] grasps them under their armpits, taking the soul of every believer and every Muslim. And there will remain the worst of the people, having intercourse as donkeys do [in front of other people as they watch]. So it is upon them that the Hour will be established" [Sahih Muslim].

And in another narration, "Allah will send a cold breeze from the direction of Sham, so no one will remain on the face of the earth with so much as the weight of a mustard seed of goodness or faith in his heart except that it takes him. Even if one of you were to enter into the center of a mountain, the breeze would enter into it, until it takes him. Then there will remain the worst of the people, who have the agility of birds (in their haste to commit evil and satisfy their lusts) and the wits of vicious, predatory animals (in their hostility and oppression of one another). They do not know any good, nor do they denounce any evil" [Sahih Muslim].

This pleasant breeze takes the souls of the believers everywhere on the earth: al-Hijaz, Iraq, Yemen, Sham, and so on. It will be sent forth a number of years after the demise of the Dajjal and the passing away of the Masih 'Isa (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam).

Shaykhul-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (rahimahullah) said, "Islam in the end of times will be more manifest in Sham. [ .. ] So the best of the people on the earth in the end of times will be those who keep to the land of Ibrahim's hijrah, which is Sham" [Majmu'ul-Fatawa].

I'm not as impressed as others by the supposed "slickness" of the magazine, but the argumentation as illustrated here deserves careful consideration and appropriate rebuttal from qualified scholars.



## Background materials, various:

### **Islam and terrorism: from opinions to facts:**

This section is designed to get us past the different opinions people may have, to some of the facts here. Different people have all sorts of views on the question of whether or not today's terrorism is "about ISLAM" -- often based on:

- wishing to defend Muslims because they have admirable Muslim friends
- wishing to retaliate because they have been attacked by terrorists claiming to be Muslims
- wishing to attack a major world religion because they believe it disagrees fundamentally with their own
- wishing to protect the reputation of a major world religion because it is their own
- wishing to protect the reputation of a major world religion because their own teaches them to respect others
- wishing to deride a US President because they dislike him
- wishing to support a US president because they like him

and so on...

These are opinions, however, and there are some facts to consider. As Daniel Patrick Moynihan -- or perhaps it was James R Schlesinger? -- once said:

Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.

The facts include these:

- Many, many Muslims are appalled by terrorist violence
- Some terrorists claim Islamic justification for their acts
- Many, many Muslims view the ideology of IS and AQ as a horrible misinterpretation of their faith
- There are many Muslims worldwide who feel some measure of anger at US foreign policy
- There are many patriotic American Muslims, who love their country
- Many Imams worldwide have condemned terrorism and/or specific terrorist acts
- Many Imams worldwide have condemned specific terrorist groups, including AQ and ISIS

Sources to confirm each of these claims can easily be found.

More significantly in some ways:

- whatever people claim, their acts are always based on a mix of human nature, their culture, circumstances and personality, and are thus always "multi-causal".

It is therefore inappropriate to lay the blame on any one factor, and in the case of those who claim to be jihadists, very important to distinguish between the different schools claiming to represent Islam -- down to the degree where we can distinguish :

- Muslims from Sikhs -- wearing a turban doesn't make you a terrorist
- Within Islam, Sunni from Shia -- some major US Government officials concerned with terrorism have a hard time with this one
- various strands of Sufism
- Wahhabi Salafists from Deobandi, important in distinguishing Taliban from AQ
- Purists, politicians, and jihadis among the Salafists -- Quentin Wiktorowicz's important distinction
- And among the Shia, "quietist" clerics like the Ayatollah Sistani from "activist" clerics like the Ayatollah Khamenei

That's an awful lot to know, and not everyone can spend their days making sense of all the details. In the meantime it is best to assume that reports you see on the news very often misrepresent the facts, because the reporters only managed to get a small part of the whole picture right. Often, they get flown in to cover a breaking story, and have no previous experience of the subject to draw on...

There are, however, people who know these sorts of things like the back of their hands, and are worth trusting. Among the very best are:

- Will McCants, @will\_mccants,
- Aaron Zelin, @azelin, and
- JM Berger, @intelwire on Twitter

For a description of people like these, and how they work, see:

The jihadi hunters: A new generation of self-made experts is tracking extremists through their online activity — and rewriting the rules of intelligence in the process

<http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2014/10/02/the-jihadi-hunters/tTC2t6UNlyzlioSoGBs5VO/story.html>

### **Apocalyptic, the missing insight:**

Edward Luttwak notes in Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson's collection titled *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*:

Policymakers, diplomats, journalists, and scholars who are ready to overinterpret economic causality, who are apt to dissect social differentiations most finely, and who will minutely categorize political affiliations are still in the habit of disregarding the role of religion, religious institutions, and religious motivations in explaining politics and conflict, and even in reporting their concrete modalities. Equally, the role of religious leaders, religious institutions, and religiously motivated lay figures in conflict resolution has also been disregarded -- or treated as a marginal phenomenon hardly worth noting.

Mary Habeck, author of *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, observes:

The consistent need to find explanations other than religious ones for the attacks says, in fact, more about the West than it does about the jihadis. Western scholars have generally failed to take religion seriously. Secularists, whether liberals or socialists, grant true explanatory power to political, social, or economic factors but discount the plain sense of religious statements made by the jihadis themselves. To see why jihadis declared war on the United States and tried to kill as many Americans as possible, we must be willing to listen to their own explanations. To do otherwise is to impose a Western interpretation on the extremists, in effect to listen to ourselves rather than to them.

Dr Gary Sick, who was with the National Security Council at the time of the Iranian hostage crisis, told a BBC interviewer:

There was no Islamic fundamentalism for all practical purposes before Iran. I mean, this was the first major manifestation of Islamic fundamentalism, of Islamic politics, Islamism. It was not something we were familiar with at all. So the whole concept was new and radical and required a serious shift of thinking. And a friend of mine said to me at the time, "You know, whoever took religion seriously?" You dealt with politics and religion really had very little to do with that.

Millennial "end times" expectation typically intensifies religious sentiments, frequently encouraging adherents to adopt extreme "antinomian" measures in light of the impending Judgment, which is perceived as abrogating all human laws.

Apocalyptic is, however, an under-appreciated area of religious scholarship, despite that fact that such groups as the (Waco) Branch Davidians, (Japanese) Aum Shinrikyo, (Chinese) Falun Gong, (Sunni) al Qaida and (Shiite) Mahdi's Army all hold apocalyptic beliefs.

One of the greatest risks we face in the Islamic world is that we could be blindsided by apocalyptic fervor, either in the form of a Mahdist movement, or in reaction to extremist Zionist (Christian or Jewish) attacks on Temple Mount / the Noble Sanctuary in Jerusalem

David Cook is our foremost scholar on apocalyptic movements within the Islamic world. He writes:

Many monotheistic faiths encompass strains of belief that the end of the world is approaching, but such strains are not usually deemed "respectable." The more specific these beliefs, the less respect they receive... The general disdain for such beliefs is so great that a scholar publishing on this subject is a source of acute embarrassment to any established religious institution of higher learning with which he -- or very rarely she -- is associated.

The same type of academic disdain was prevalent enough in European circles that the psychologist Carl Jung once wrote:

I will not discuss the transparent prophecies of the Book of Revelation, because no one believes in them and the whole subject is felt to be an embarrassing one.

Dr O'Leary notes in his book, *Arguing the Apocalypse*:

Apocalyptic arguments made by people of good and sincere faith have apparently succeeded in persuading millions; it is unfair and dangerous to dismiss these arguments as irrational and the audiences persuaded by them as ignorant fools. In a world where bright utopic visions compete with increasingly plausible scenarios of global catastrophe, it seems imperative to understand

how our anticipations of the future may be both inspired and limited by the ancient logic of apocalypticism.

One of our finest recent scholars of religious violence, Jessica Stern, was initially taken aback by the apocalyptic intensity of the terrorists she studied:

I have come to see that apocalyptic violence intended to "cleanse" the world of "impurities" can create a transcendent state. All the terrorist groups examined in this book believe --- or at least started out believing --- that they are creating a more perfect world. From their perspective, they are purifying the world of injustice, cruelty, and all that is antihuman. When I began this project, I could not understand why the killers I met seemed spiritually intoxicated. Now, I think I understand. They seem that way because they are.

Timothy Furnish has been warning us about the perils of Mahdist movements since 1999. David Cook lectured the Center for Millennial Studies on the subject in the late 1990s, and published his book, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature* in 2005, as did Furnish his *Holiest Wars: Islamic Mahdis, Their Jihads, and Osama bin Laden*, while J-P Filiu published his *Apocalypse in Islam* in French in 2008 and English in 2011.

It is not as though the topic has not been discussed – but it was not until very recently that a senior US official mentioned the eschatological nature of jihadist movements.

DNI James Clapper has called the Syrian situation an “apocalyptic disaster” -- but that’s using “apocalyptic” as a synonym for “nightmareish” in much the same way that the phrase “of biblical proportions” is often used to mean “enormous” — it’s a loosening of the word.

The NSC’s 2009 National Strategy for Countering Biological Threats uses the word in its specifically theological meaning when it refers to “the apocalyptic Aum Shinrikyo cult” which “sprayed a liquid containing *Bacillus anthracis* (anthrax) spores from the roof of their headquarters near Tokyo, Japan”..

But it is only now, almost a decade and a half after the events of 9/11, that a senior Administration has finally admitted that the jihadist movement is driven by an end times ideology. In late August, 2014, Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, said of ISIS:

This is an organisation that has an apocalyptic, end-of-days strategic vision which will eventually have to be defeated.

### **Ahadith, the traditions of the Prophet:**

For your reference, the six major collections of ahadith recognized in the Sunni branch of Islam are:

- Sahih Bukhari of Imam Bukhari
- Sahih Muslim of Muslim b. al-Hajjaj
- Sunan Abu Dawood of Abu Dawood
- Jami al-Tirmidhi of al-Tirmidhi
- Sunan al-Sughra of al-Nasai
- Sunan ibn Majah of Ibn Majah

Of these, the first two are considered the most authoritative. Some schools would include the Muwatta of Imam Malik in place of ibn Majah.

The four principal books of ahadith recognized by the Shia branch, which split from the Sunni branch in a dispute over who should be the Prophet's successor and first Caliph or political leader of Islam, are:

- Kitab al-Kafi of Muhammad Yaqub Kulayni
- Man la yahduruhu al-Faqih of Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Qummi
- Tahdhib al-Ahkam of Shaykh Muhammad Tusi
- Al-Istibsar of Shaykh Muhammad Tusi

### **The Hour, the Day, the End, the Appointed Time:**

All eschatologies refer to the end times – but the end of what, exactly?

The Quran states that the Hour – sometimes translated the Day – is known by none but God alone:

They ask you about the Hour (Day of Resurrection): "When will be its appointed time?" Say: "The knowledge thereof is with my Lord (Alone). None can reveal its time but He. Heavy is its burden through the heavens and the earth. It shall not come upon you except all of a sudden." They ask you as if you have a good knowledge of it. Say: "The knowledge thereof is with Allah (Alone) but most of mankind know not."

Compare the Christian New Testament, Mark 13.32:

But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

The Hour may come very soon. According to the commentator Ibn Kathir in his list of Signs before the Day of Judgment:

Some Ahadith report that the Prophet was asked about the Hour. He looked towards a young boy and said, "If he lives, he will not grow very old before he sees your Last Hour coming to you."

Compare the Christian New Testament, Matthew 24. 34:

Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

But can the eschaton, the End, be hastened? There are also verses in the Quran which can be read as saying the end cannot be hastened:

Those who believe not therein seek to hasten it, while those who believe are fearful of it, and know that it is the very truth. Verily, those who dispute concerning the Hour are certainly in error far away. Quran 42. 18

and:

Say (O Muhammad saw): The appointment to you is for a Day, which you cannot put back for an hour (or a moment) nor put forward. Quran 34.30

One simple problem makes the meaning of these verses \_- and the phrases “the Day”, “the Hour”, and “the Day of Judgment”—difficult to interpret. They may refer either to the day of an individual’s death, which leads to Judgment, or to the “end times”, followed by the universal Day of Judgment.

As one commentator puts it:

The word *saa’ah* is used to refer to three things: *al-saa’ah al-kubra* (the greater Hour), which is when the people will be resurrected to face the Reckoning; *al-saa’ah al-wusta* (the middle Hour) which is the death of a generation; and *al-saa’ah al-sughra* (the lesser hour) which is a person’s death.

It is only the specific mention of the Mahdi or Dajjal, or other signs associated directly with the end-of-the-world battles known as the *Malahim*, which makes it clear that a given reference is to the “end of the world” rather than the end of an individual life.

#### **Accusations of Messianism / Mahdism:**

Benjamin Netanyahu, PM of Israel, speaking of then Iranian President Ahmadinejad, said:

You don’t want a messianic apocalyptic cult controlling atomic bombs. When the wide-eyed believer gets hold of the reins of power and the weapons of mass death, then the entire world should start worrying, and that is what is happening in Iran.

Netanyahu told the UN General Assembly as recently as October 2013:

In our time the Biblical prophecies are being realized.

Yuval Diskin, former head of Israel’s Shin Bet General Security Service, saw a similar apocalypticism in PM Netanyahu, saying:

I don’t believe in a leadership that makes decisions based on messianic feelings. I have observed them from up close. I fear very much that these are not the people I’d want at the wheel.

Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon called John Kerry “obsessive” and “messianic” in January 2014.

Further afield, Hugo Chavez, late President of Venezuela and a friend of Ahmadinejad, is reported to have claimed

The Messiah [Jesus] and the Mahdi are not dead, they are alive and well and will soon return to spread justice over all the world.

and to have prayed:

I ask Jesus and the Mahdi, the Hidden Imam to hasten their arrival.

This, however, may have been cross-cultural diplomacy.

And for what it's worth, when Julian Assange was asked by an interviewer:

Do you see yourself... as some sort of messianic figure?

he responded:

Everyone would like to be a messianic figure without dying.

### **Clash of rival eschatologies:**

Timothy Furnish has a PhD in Islamic history, and has served as both an Arabic Interrogator and then Christian Chaplain with the 101st Airborne. He has lectured at the Joint Special Operations University, and is the author of *Holiest Wars: Islamic Mahdis, their Jihads and Osama Bin Laden*. Here he discusses the impact of Christian and Islamic eschatologies meeting:

[T]he last thing the US military or intelligence community needs is to have the genuine war against apocalypse-fired Islamic militants conflated with a narrowly Evangelical Christian view of matters. The US government is a secular, not a religious, one — and although I have repeatedly criticized the refusal of the leader of the world's largest Christian-populated nation to do anything about global persecution of Christians, I do NOT want our forces engaged in an Evangelical Protestant "Crusade." Furthermore, and just as (if not more) importantly, opposing and defeating the Islamic "apocalyptic strategic vision" — which is shared by groups besides IS[IS] — can only be done by analyzing said vision on its own Muslim terms, using Muslim (Arabic, Turkish and Persian) sources. Frankly, in this fight, I don't give a damn in this context what Revelation or Ezekiel or Daniel say — it matters more what's in the Qur'an, the Hadiths, and Islamic commentators thereupon. I say this to my Evangelical brethren: it's not always about you and your interpretation of Christian Scripture. The rest of us (Catholic, Orthodox, Lutherans, etc.) in the fold might have something worthwhile to say on the topic, too — but this fight against IS[IS] is neither the time nor the place.

MahdiWatch, ISIS: Apocalypse...How? August 27, 2014

Christian end times thinking about the Islamic end times nevertheless permeates the writings of people such as novelist Joel Rosenberg, and Rosenberg in turn influences those with influence in policy circles. Porter Goss, ex-CIA Director, for example, writes:

Whenever I see a new Joel Rosenberg book coming out, I know I need to clear time on my calendar. His penetrating knowledge of all things Mid-eastern — coupled with his intuitive knack for high stakes intrigue — demand attention.

Sadly -- and dangerously -- Rosenberg's knowledge of Islamic eschatology is deficient. Thus he told Glenn Beck in an interview that the current Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, "has been a secret closet 12er". That's a bit like saying the Pope "has been a secret closet Catholic".

Beck himself has claimed:

Twelvers are so dangerous that the Ayatollah Khomeini at one point banned them, said we've gotta kill 'em all because they're too crazy — the Ayatollah Khomeini said that

This is simply ignorant. The name "Twelvers" describes the main body of Shia believers -- in Iran, Iraq and around the globe. Beck and Rosenberg are both confusing them with the Hojratieh society, which was indeed banned by Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's first Supreme Authority and the father of the Islamic Revolution which overthrew the Shah in Iran. Worse, Beck and Rosenberg both believe the group that's "so dangerous that the Ayatollah Khomeini at one point banned them" is secretly active to hasten the "soon coming" of the Mahdi by stirring up chaos in general and nuclear war in particular. The Hojratieh never was a group designed to hasten the coming of the Mahdi: its purpose was to combat the Bahai faith, an offshoot of Shia Islam in the nineteenth century, and now a world religion in its own right.

Joel Richardson, another "end times" Christian writer on Islamic eschatology, sets the record straight:

Beck needs to have me on sometime. He gets a lot of his info wrong. Ayatollah Khomeini never banned "Twelvers", as he himself was one. He banned the Hojratieh ...

Dr Furnish -- himself a "conservative Christian" -- unlike Beck and Rosenberg reads and writes the relevant languages, and comments:

My own study of both geopolitics and of Shi'i traditions on the 12th Imam leads me to conclude that the clerical regime does NOT believe in nuking Israel (or anyone else), because while the Mahdi will return at a time of great violence and upheaval, there is no Shi'i teaching that creating such bloodshed would induce Allah to send him. Also, I think the ayatollahs are crazy like foxes, not literally crazy—and they know full-well what would be the Israeli (and perhaps American) response to any use of nuclear weapons against Israel. The Mahdi would not be happy to return and rule over a radioactive wasteland.

and in more detail:

While in Iran for the 2008 Mahdism Conference, I heard both President Ahmadinejad and Prime Minister Ali Larijani speak. Ahmadinejad said, regarding Israel and Shi'i



eschatology, that “the [problem of the false, fabricated Zionist regime] would not be solved “in the absence of the Perfect Man, the Mahdi” -- effectively dousing the alarmist, and inaccurate, view that the IRI’s chief executive wishes to “hotwire the apocalypse.” Islamic fervor for lighting that eschatological detonation cord exists among certain Sunnis groups (including, quite possibly, al Qa`idah) -- but it is not characteristic of Twelver Shi`ism. Larijani, in the closing speech of that same conference, proclaimed that “Mahdism has three pillars: spirituality, rationalism and jihad.” It is admittedly possible, despite all the aforementioned reasoning, that “their own vitriolic rhetoric could conceivably run away with the leaders of the Islamic Republic, and an Iranian nuclear weapon find its way to Tel Aviv.” But the preponderance of evidence—Islamic history in general, specific Shi`l traditions and teachings as well as modern religio-political discourse in Iran—indicates, rather, that the rationality and spirituality of Iranian Mahdism is holding at bay its undeniable jihad aspect. Tehran thus, ironically, finds its potential nuclear policy fettered by Qom: mainstream Shi`i theology does not support violence (nuclear or conventional) in order to precipitate the return of the 12th Imam; furthermore, employing nuclear weapons is verboten in the Mahdi’s absence -- except, perhaps, under the rubric of defensive jihad, were Iran itself to be attacked or invaded. Seen in this light, the Islamic Republic’s pursuit of nuclear weapons falls from the overly-alarmist apocalyptic register into a more mundane, and manageable, geopolitical one.

#### **Excerpt: Will McCants, ISIS Fantasies of an Apocalyptic Showdown in Northern Syria**

Jihadi tweets about Dabiq spiked again last month when the United States began to consider military action against the Islamic State in Syria. Islamic State supporters counted the number of nations who had signed up for the “Rome’s” coalition against the Islamic State. “Thirty states remain to complete the number of eighty flags that will gather in Dabiq and begin the battle.” Yesterday, after Turkey’s parliament approved military operations against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, the jihadi twittersphere applauded “Turkey’s entry into the war will permit the foreign invasion of northern Syria, meaning from the plain of Dabiq. The battles (of the End Times) have grown near.”

“#Turkey\_committedsuicide,” tweeted another. “In Dabiq the crusade will end.”

The last time the Turks invaded Dabiq, things did not go well for the Arabs. The Turkish Ottoman sultan, Selim I, defeated the slave armies of the Mamluk Sultanate in the meadow of Dabiq in 1516, which gave them the eastern Mediterranean and eventually Egypt and the Hijaz, inaugurating 500 years of Ottoman rule over the Arabs. His grandfather Mehmed II conquered Constantinople from “Rome,” the Byzantine Empire and his son Suleiman the Magnificent would go on to conquer large swathes of eastern Europe.

The fact that Turkish Muslims, not infidel Romans, control Constantinople today and are working with the infidel Romans against the Islamic State makes the Dabiq prophecy a poor fit for contemporary events. The inevitable defeat of the Islamic State at Dabiq, should it ever confront “Rome,” would also argue against the prophecy’s applicability. But in the apocalyptic imagination, inconvenient facts rarely impede the glorious march to the end of the world.

## Partial Glossary of terms relating to Islamic eschatology

### Sunni, Shia and Sufi:

- The Sunnis are the majority Muslims who accept the four Rashidun Caliphs as the proper successors to Muhammad.
- The Shia or “Party of Ali” hold that Ali was Muhammad’s chosen successor, and split away from the Sunni to form a significant minority. There are several Shia groups, the Twelvers (believers in a succession of Twelve Imams) being the most notable.
- The Sufis are Islamic mystics, gathered into *tariqat* or quasi-monastic schools, for whom the concept of the end times may refer to the eternal present. Ibn Arabi, noted Sufi philosopher and poet, wrote about the Mahdi.

**Qiyama:** the Islamic Judgment Day.

**Signs before the Day of Judgment:** numerous lists of the minor and major signs which will precede the *Qiyama* exist. Ibn Kathir’s is exemplary. It can be found here:

<http://daarulhadeeth.org/2014/08/16/signs-before-the-day-of-judgement-by-ibn-kathir/>

**Mahdi:** The major figure in Islamic eschatology, the Mahdi is the expected final Reformer or Mujadid who will come in the end times to bring justice and peace to earth. Sunnis generally believe the Mahdi will be assisted in this mission by the return of Christ (Isa). In Shia eschatology, it is believed the Mahdi already lived as the Twelfth of the Shiite Imams and went into occultation while still a child, and will return. He is thus also known as the Hidden Imam.

**Mahdi claimants:** Notable claimants to the title of Mahdi include:

- **Ibn Tumart:** a Moroccan who declared himself Mahdi early in the 12th century and founded what became the Almohad caliphate.
- **The Bab:** Ali Muhammad Shirazi proclaimed himself Mahdi in 1844 and founded Babism. He was later viewed as a John the Baptist like precursor to Bahauallah, the founder of the Bahai religion.
- **Muhammad Ahmad:** Muhammad Ahmad proclaimed himself Mahdi in Sudan, 1881, and fought the Sudanese, Egyptian and British forces. British troops sent to rescue General Gordon during the siege of Khartoum arrived too late -- Gordon and his compamnions had been massacred.
- **Mirza Ghulam Ahmad:** Ahmad claimed to be both the returning Christ and the Mahdi, and founded the Ahmadi sect which claims to be Muslim but is rejected by both Sunni and Shia.

- **Juhayman al-Otaybi:** leader of the 1979 siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, a Mahdist "end times" attack which was put down by the Saudi government with considerable bloodshed, viewed by some scholars as the precursor of bin Laden's al-Qaida ideology.

**Mecca** is the pivot of the Muslim world. It was here that Muhammed received the first suras of the Quran, from here that he made the Hijra to Medina, and from here that he was carried on the steed Buraq to the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, and ascended the heavens to receive instructions for Muslim prayer on the night journey known as the Miraj.

**Kaaba:** The pilgrimage of Hajj, one of Islam's five great obligations, brings Muslims from all over the world to Mecca to circumambulate the Kaaba, a black cube containing a rock that in the end times will join its companion, the rock found at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The Kaaba is the Qibla or point to which all Muslims turn in prayer. In the earliest times, Muslims turned towards Jerusalem to pray.

**Khorasan:** The area historically known as Khorasan included parts of Iran, where there is still a province by the name, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkmenistan. It is the gathering place for armies with black banners which will march victoriously to Jerusalem according to a group of ahadith, and of another army that will conquer India in the Ghazwa e-Hind.

**Khorasan Group:** The Khorasan Group which was suddenly declared a major threat by the US Government in early September 2014, with DNI James Clapper claiming that "in terms of threat to the homeland, Khorasan may pose as much of a danger as the Islamic State". Although details are sketchy, it appears to be the name given by US officials to a group within the Al-Qaida affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra, sent by al-Qaida Central in the Afghan-Pakistan region to strengthen Jabhat's ties to al-Qaida and provide experienced military guidance. FBI director James Comey *stated in October 2014 "Khorasan was working and you know, may still be working on an effort to attack the United States or our allies, and looking to do it very, very soon."* Journalist Jenan Moussa found documents related to the group after a US bombing raid. According to these documents, internally, they are known as The Wolf Unit of Jabhat al-Nusra.

**Black Banners:** Muhammad's battle flag was a black banner. Since his time black banners have often been raised by groups claiming to fight jihad. It seems likely that the Abbasids forged a number of ahadith about "black banners from Khorasan" to support themselves in their fight against the Umayyads, and black flags and the associated ahadith are used by al-Qaida and IS today. The indication is that they are the victorious armies of the end times.

**The siege of Mecca:** on the first day of the year 1400 according to the Islamic calendar, 20 November 1979, a group of 300 armed men led by Juhayman al-Otaybi occupied the Grand Mosque in Mecca. al-Otaybi subsequently proclaimed his brother-in-law Mohammed Abdullah al-Qahtani to be the awaited Mahdi.

**Ghazwa e-Hind:** The Ghaza e-Hind or Raid on India is a second prong of the traditions about the armies with black banners from Khorasan, complementary to the victorious army from

Khorasan marching to Jerusalem. The Ghazwa army will march from the same area down into India to reclaim the subcontinent for Islam.

**Mohammed bin Laden:** billionaire Saudi contractor responsible for upkeep of the mosques in Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem, he is reported to have left millions of dollars in a trust to support the Mahdi on his arrival on earth. Father of Osama bin Laden.

**Osama Bin Laden:** wealthy businessman who founded al-Qaida, thought by some to be the mujaddid or reformer of the age.

**Ghayba:** In Shia doctrine, the Twelfth and final Imam is supposed to have entered a state of "occultation" while still a boy, rendering him invisible as he awaits the time of his return as Mahdi.

**Mujaddid:** A once-in-a-century Reformer of Islam

**Hijra:** The Hijrah refers both to Muhammad's departure from Mecca to Medina, and by extension to Muslims leaving their home countries to fight jihad

**Isa:** Isa bin Maryam or Jesus, son of Mary, viewed as a prophet in Islam, is expected to return to earth during the end times, to kill the Dajjal and offer his support to the Mahdi, instructing his Christian followers to become Muslims. He is expected to return from the heavens at or near the Minaret of Isa at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus.

**Damascus:** Capital of the Umayyad caliphate, believed to be the place where the Prophet Isa (Jesus) will return in the end times.

**Caliph:** inheritor of Muhammad's role as ruler of the Muslim Ummah. The four Rashidun or Rightly Guided caliphs were the Prophet's immediate successors according to Sunni tradition, while the Shia believe the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali, third of the Rashidun caliphs, was the Prophet's chosen successor, and regard him as the first of the Twelve Imams, the last of whom is the Mahdi, now in occultation.

**Caliphate:** the "nation" formed by the entire Ummah or people of Islam, ruled by a caliph or supreme ruler claimed to be Muhammad's successor. The main caliphates in Islamic history have been the Rashidun, Umayyad, Cordoban, Abbasid, Fatimid & Ottoman caliphates, the latter ending in 1924. The Islamic State claims to be a caliphate, and hence to be owe the obedience of every Muslim.

**Dabiq** is a town in northern Syria, site of a 1516 battle between the Mamluks and Ottomans, and mentioned in a hadith as the site of a major end times confrontation between Islam and the west. It is also the name of the Islamic State's English-language magazine.

**Sham:** Greater Syria. Roughly equivalent to "the Levant", and including an area variously considered to include present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Cyprus.

**Tel Megiddo:** Hill south Haifa in Israel, site of the final Battle of Armageddon in Christian eschatology.

**Moshiach:** Hebrew for “the anointed one” or Messiah, the awaited Great One of Judaism. Christ is a translation of the same term used by Christians to indicate their view that Jesus was the fulfillment of Jewish messianic prophecy.

**Second Coming:** The expected return of Christ at the end times, variously interpreted by the different schools of Christian eschatology – preterist, dispensationalist, etc.

**Rapture:** The concept of all faithful Christians “being caught up” in the air with Christ, a 19<sup>th</sup> century interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:16 widely disseminated by the “Scofield Bible” and now the centerpiece of dispensational eschatology, and fictionalized in the *Left Behind* series of books and movies.

**Safar al-Hawali:** A Saudi sheikh whose writings were read by Osama bin Laden. His treatise, *The Day of Wrath*, predicted the fall of Jerusalem and beginning of the end times for 2012.

**Ibrahim:** The Quranic spelling of the name Abraham, taken by Abu Bakr *al-Baghdadi* as his title as Caliph of the Islamic State.

**Ayman al-Zawahiri.** Successor to Osama bin Laden as leader of al-Qaida.

**Abu Musab al Suri:** author of the 1,600 page treatise on jihad, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, which closes with a 100-page exposition of end times hadith. French scholar-diplomat J-P Filiu comments that “There is nothing in the least theoretical about this exercise in apocalyptic exegesis. It is meant instead as a guide for action.”

**Al-Quds:** Arabic name for Jerusalem, a city that was the first Qibla or orientation for Muslim prayer, and thus a sister-city to Mecca, the second and final Qibla.

**Qibla:** The obligatory direction of prayer for Muslims. Jerusalem was the first Qibla, Mecca the second.

**The Noble Sanctuary:** In Arabic, the Haram al-Sharif, is the platform known to Judaism and the west as Temple Mount in Jerusalem. It contains the al-Aqsa Mosque, from which Muhammad is believed by Muslims to have ascended the heavens on his Miraj or Night Journey, returning with the rules for Islamic prayer, and also the Dome of the Rock.

**Al-Aqsa:** The farthest Mosque, to which Muhammad is supposed to have been carried by his steed Buraq, on the first leg (the *Isra*) of his ascent of the heavens (the *Miraj*).

**Ayatollah Khomeini:** Cleric who led the 1979 Iranian Revolution and instituted the doctrine and system of *Vilayat e-Faqih* whereby Iran is ruled by the Supreme Jurisprudent, a position he assigned to himself, now held by the Ayatollah Khamenei.

**Vilayat e-Faqih:** According to the doctrine of Vilayat, the Supreme Jurisprudent rules on behalf of the Hidden Imam. The doctrine is one under which Iran currently operates, but is denied by other Shia authorities, notably Ayatollah Sistani of Najaf, the Ayatollah with the greatest global following.

**Ahmadinejad:** Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is the former President of Iran, known for populist rhetoric supporting the soon coming of the Imam Mahdi, with whom he was alleged to have been in contact. Notably, mentioned the Mahdi in addresses to the United Nations as the coming world reformer.

**Kharijites:** An extremist group of early Muslim heretics whose considerable outward piety was matched by a propensity for declaring other Muslims to be unbelievers – by extension, any group of pious but extreme Muslims who proclaim *takfir* on other Muslims.

**Takfir:** The term for excommunication in Islam – the declaration other Muslims to be *kuffar*, unbelievers, and thus worthy of death.

**Malahim:** the end times battles in Islamic eschatology.

**Al-Malhamah al-Kubra:** the great and final eschatological battle.

**Bahai:** The Bahai faith, an offshoot of Shia Islam founded by Bahauallah, a messenger from God preceded by the Bab. Persecuted in Iran for holding that the Bab and Bahauallah are Prophets, whereas orthodox Islam believes Muhammad to be the Seal (last) of the Prophets.

**Ayn Fard:** An individual obligation on all able Muslims, as opposed to Fard Kifaya, which is an obligation that some Muslims must fulfill, without specifying that all individual Muslims are so obliged. Contemporary jihadists following al-Faraj and frequently claim that jihad against the west is now *ayn fard*.

**Abd al-Salam al-Faraj:** Egyptian radical involved in the assassination of Anwar Sadat, author of the pamphlet *The Neglected Duty*, al-Faraj preached that human effort in jihad coupled with divine assistance would bring about Islamic victory over the forces of the infidel.

**Sayyid Qutb:** Egyptian revolutionary and writer, Qutb or Qutub is the author of *Milestones* and the Quranic commentary *In the Shade of the Quran*,

**Dajjal:** The False Messiah (Arabic: *al-Masih al-Dajjal*) often termed “the Islamic Antichrist”. He is the Islamic end times figure defeated by the returning Jesus (Isa). He is reported to be blind in one eye.

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#### Useful blogs:

- **Jihadology:** Aaron Zelin's site collects original jihadist sources <http://jihadology.com>
- **Jihadica:** Founded by Will McCants for analysis of jihadism <http://www.jihadica.com>
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- **Zenpundit:** many posts monitor apocalyptic jihadist violence <http://zenpundit.com>