



(Photo by Associated Press)

Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim al-Badri (commonly known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi) announces his appointment as caliph (successor to Mohammad) of the Islamic State (Daesh) 4 July 2014 in Mosul, Iraq. Under this designation, he assumed leadership of what Daesh's adherents considered the world's authentic Islamic community (excluding Shia and others they regard as Muslim apostates). This event has been his only known public appearance before the media.

# How Daesh Uses Language in the Domain of Religion

Maj. Theresa Ford, U.S. Army

*Jihadis can't seem to get enough anashid [devotional songs, often with ideological themes]. They listen to them in their dorms and in their cars, sing them in training camps and in the trenches, and discuss them on Twitter and Facebook.*

—Thomas Hegghammer

This article examines the religious words and ideas the terrorist group Daesh, sometimes called Islamic State, uses to attract recruits. These words and ideas—from the name of its organization, its leader, and its online propaganda magazine, to key figures and ideas of Islam, including the prophet Mohammad, the end-of-days prophecy, and the caliphate—are components of the domain of *deen*, an Arabic word that means faith or religion.<sup>1</sup> We must understand the complexity of the domain of *deen*, where Daesh operates, before we can “degrade and ultimately defeat” it.<sup>2</sup> This article will demonstrate that words are the weapons of Daesh, and it will show how words can help defeat it.

## Which Is It: Islamic State, ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh?

*Militants threatened to cut the tongue of anyone who publicly used the acronym Daesh, instead of referring to the group by its full name, saying it shows defiance and disrespect.*<sup>3</sup>

—Associated Press news story

What we call the enemy is important. The fact that we and our friends and allies have yet to definitively agree on a name for this enemy speaks volumes about our lack of understanding. We use acronyms interchangeably, such as ISIS for Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIL for Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Using those names and their acronyms, however, gives these terrorists the religious and political veneer they seek. Those names acknowledge that the group is Islamic, and that it is a state. Neither premise, however, is legitimate. Therefore, this article uses the name Daesh, which is based on the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Daesh sounds similar to an Arabic word that means to bruise or crush; the group’s leaders consider the word insulting. This article uses it with the intent to strip away any religious or political legitimacy that other acronyms suggest.<sup>4</sup>

Our friends and allies are encouraging others to use the name Daesh, just as the Arab League and France

currently do.<sup>5</sup> Why then, would we in the United States continue to call the enemy ISIS or ISIL, with our own choice of words giving legitimacy to a terrorist group we seek to destroy? Perhaps it is because we do not understand how much words matter to Daesh.

## Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Quraishi, Leader of Daesh

*Verily the chiefest among you all for love and devotion to me is Abu Bekr. If I were to choose a bosom friend it would be he.*<sup>6</sup>

—Mohammad

The Daesh leader uses the name Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Quraishi for its religious significance. While not his real name, it conveys themes that resonate with his followers. *Abu Bakr*, “father of the virgin” in Arabic, was the name of the prophet Mohammad’s best friend.<sup>7</sup> This friend was the father of Aishah, the only virgin bride of Mohammad. When Mohammad died, Abu Bakr (sometimes spelled *Bekr*) became the first successor, or caliph. The Daesh leader’s middle name, *al-Baghdadi*, refers to someone from Baghdad, and his last name, *al-Quraishi*, refers to someone from the Quraish family.

The Daesh leader wants to associate himself in the minds of his followers with the first caliph of Islam. He wants to recapture the fervor and spirit of the first “rightly guided caliph,” and, supposedly, to put the Islamic community, or *um-mah*, back on the straight path of early Islam. The Daesh leader is the father of a young daughter and can use the name Abu Bakr in a literal sense.

In fact, his middle name is used to mislead, as he is not from Baghdad. He hails from the town of Samarra, revered by the Shia because it contains the tombs of the tenth and eleventh imams. Samarra is thought to be the birthplace of the *Mahdi*, a religious figure that Muslims believe will appear at the end of days.<sup>8</sup> The Daesh leader uses the name al-Baghdadi

because, according to former Daesh member Abu Omar, he wants to “revive the glory of the Abbasid



(Photo via Wikimedia Commons)

The calligraphic representation of the first Rashidun caliph, Abu Bakr, which is prominent in the Hagia Sofia museum in Istanbul, Turkey.

# Editor's Sidebar: The Next Caliph?

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi borrows heavily from an ancient predecessor in his quest to be considered the next caliph. Compare the speech excerpts of the two in the texts below.

## Abu Bakr al-Siddiq

**Editor's note**—Born in 573 AD, Abu Bakr, a prosperous merchant, converted to Islam in ap-



(Image via Wikimedia Commons)

A sixteenth-century depiction by an unnamed Turkish artist of Abu Bakr stopping an angry Meccan mob from stoning Muhammad.

proximately 621 AD. He subsequently became Muhammad's closest friend, described in the Muslim hadith writings as serving in the capacity of traveling companion, advisor, sometime military lieutenant, and intimate confidant. Following Muhammad's death in 632, Abu Bakr was selected by a group of Muhammad's leading companions (though not all supported his selection) to be Muhammad's successor (*caliph*) and to lead the developing and expanding Islamic state, which was then embroiled in a series

of expansionist wars and internal rebellions. Upon selection, Abu Bakr gave a short acceptance speech, prominently recorded in the Muslim hadith (*sayings*), excerpted below:

*O people, I have been appointed over you, though I am not the best among you. If I do well, then help me; and if I act wrongly, then correct me. Truthfulness is synonymous with fulfilling the trust, and lying is equivalent to treachery ... No group of people abandons military/armed struggle in the path of Allah, except that Allah makes them suffer humiliation ... Obey me so long as I obey Allah and His Messenger. And if I disobey Allah and His Messenger, then I have no right to your obedience. Stand up now to pray, may Allah have mercy on you.*

From Hadith Al-Bidaayah wan-Nihaayah, vol. 6, 305–6, quoted in Seyed Ibrahim, "Caliph Abu Bakr Siddeeq's (RA) Inaugural Speech: Text and Lessons," Social, Political, Economic, Career weblog, accessed 4 February 2016, <https://seyedibrahim.wordpress.com/2012/02/26/abu-bakrs-inaugural-speech/>.

## Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

**Editor's note**—"According to William McCants, Later that month [June 2014], the Islamic State's



(Photo via Wikimedia Commons)

Mug shot of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, taken while in detention, by U.S. armed forces at Camp Bucca in the vicinity of Umm Qasr, Iraq, in 2004.

An Iraqi-born religious scholar, he rose to prominence as a leader of Iraqi Islamists following the death of al-Qaida (Iraq) leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, 7 June 2006, outmaneuvering leaders of other organizations vying for control of opposition to the Shia-led, U.S.-supported government of Iraq.

in 2010. He wore black robes to evoke the memory of the Abbasid caliphs who had ruled from Baghdad; they, too, had come to power by claiming descent from the Prophet's family and promising a return to pristine Islam.

*'I was appointed to rule you but I am not the best among you,' he proclaimed. 'If you see me acting truly, then follow me. If you see me acting falsely, then advise and guide me. ... If I disobey God, then do not obey me.'*

"This was a paraphrase of what the first caliph, Abu Bakr, had said when he was elected by Muhammad's comrades."

Excerpt from William McCants, "The Believer, How an Introvert with a Passion for Religion and Soccer became Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Leader of the Islamic State," Brookings Essay 19-20, 1 September 2015, accessed 4 February 2016, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/essays/2015/thebeliever>.



Caliphate, so this [name] is also a message to the enemy that Baghdad is [theirs].”<sup>9</sup> He uses the last name al-Quraishi because the prophet Mohammad descended from the Quraish tribe, so this name is intended to impart further legitimacy to his position. It is doubtful he is descended from Mohammad, although supporters distributed the genealogy of his tribe allegedly showing such descent.<sup>10</sup>

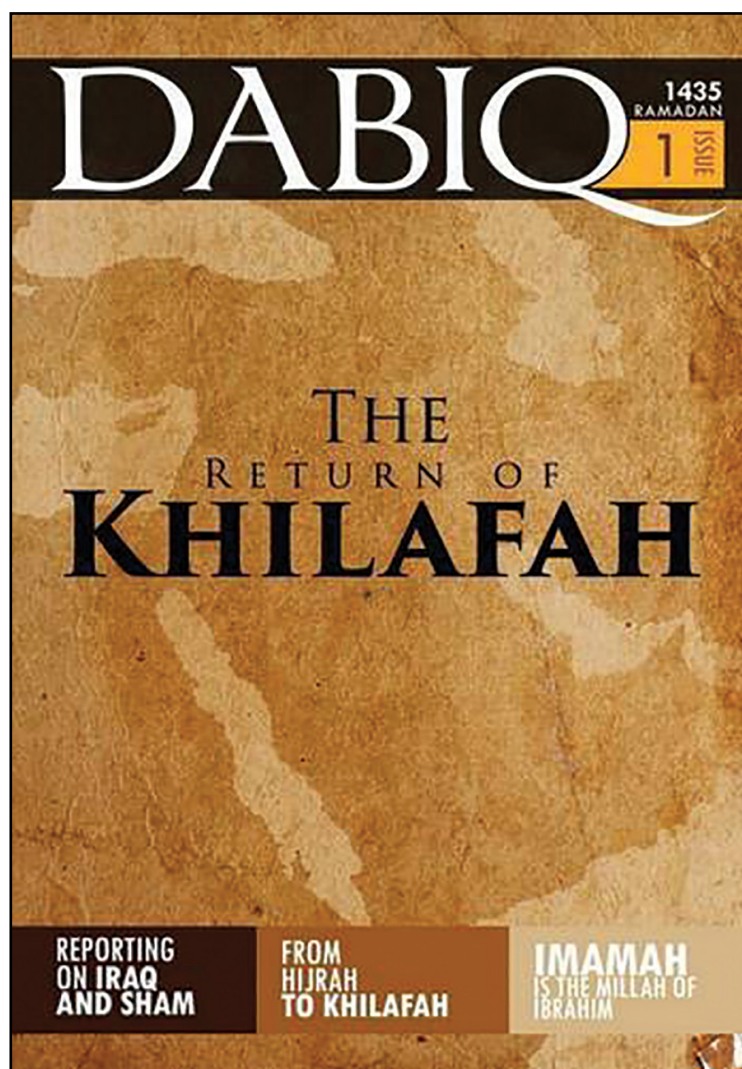
## Dabiq and the Judgment Day Narrative

*Indeed, fighting the kuffar, hijrah, and jihad will remain until the establishment of the Hour.*<sup>11</sup>

—Quoted from a hadith

Dabiq, the title of Daesh’s online propaganda magazine, is a word cloaked in religious symbolism. The word represents both a place and an idea of great significance in Islamic thought. It conjures up ideas of the place where the final battle of good versus evil will be waged, a battle that must take place to herald the end of days. Using this name for their publication “lends urgency” to the movement, according to researcher Charlie Winter, which helps convince others to join before it is too late.<sup>12</sup> While these ideas may sound far-fetched to many Westerners, they bring many recruits to the Daesh battlefield, eager to fight in the crucible to bring about the end of days. Women join Daesh because they “believe that joining [it] in Syria will secure their place in paradise.”<sup>13</sup>

The Centre on Religion and Geopolitics conducted a study of salafi-jihadist propaganda from Daesh and two other groups from April 2013 to summer 2015, including audio and written statements, videos, and magazines. The researchers found that 42 percent of the sources studied contained “explicit references to the end of days.”<sup>14</sup> For Muslims, this day is of supreme importance because Muslims believe they can only enter heaven through their actions and the grace of God.<sup>15</sup> This is why many join Daesh, as they believe that waging jihad—holy war—and becoming martyrs will guarantee their entrance to paradise, a place



(Photo via Wikimedia Commons)

The front cover of Dabiq magazine, Issue 1, July 2014.

described at length in the Quran, with flowing rivers and wide-eyed *houris* (virgins).<sup>16</sup> Many *hadith*, sayings of Mohammad, emphasize martyrdom, as in this example: “Our Prophet told us about the Message of our Lord that ‘whoever amongst us is killed (in Jihad in Allah’s Cause), will go to Paradise.’”<sup>17</sup>

The Quran describes the final day in detail, stating that, whenever it arrives, the day will be either one thousand or fifty thousand years long, the earth will quake, and sinners will go to hell with “boiling scalding water.”<sup>18</sup> While Dabiq is never mentioned in the Quran, it is mentioned in a hadith.<sup>19</sup> Daesh stresses the imminence of the end of days in its messaging. Recruits believe they must become martyrs soon, or else they may end up on the left side on judgment day, the side reserved for those going to hell.<sup>20</sup>

## Raqqa: Capital of Daesh

*During World War II, western archaeologists uncovered fresh ruins of Harun's palace in his northern capital of Raqqah.<sup>21</sup>*

—Nabia Abbott

It is no coincidence that Daesh selected the Syrian city of Raqqa as its capital. Raqqa was the home of the fifth Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid, or “Aaron the Rightly Guided.” Harun moved the caliphate from Baghdad to Raqqa and “took an active interest in the further development of the city, with its new canals and palaces and other surrounding estates.”<sup>22</sup> The Abbasid caliphate got its name from Mohammad’s uncle named Abbas. The Abbasid caliphate ushered in the Islamic Golden Age and building boom as the



(Photo via Wikimedia Commons)

The former Mosque of the Prophet Yunis (Jonah) in Mosul, Iraq, which Daesh jihadists demolished 25 July 2014.

region prospered.<sup>23</sup> By using Raqqa as its capital, Daesh wants to profit from its historic significance and from the pride that Muslims have toward this period in their history. Many believe their new caliphate will achieve similar success and prosperity.

## Abu Qasim: The Messenger of Islam

*Do not be bothered with him; he will die without descendants and that will be the end of his mission.<sup>24</sup>*

—A critic of Mohammad

During his lifetime, Mohammad was referred to as Abu Qasim, meaning “father of Qasim.” Qasim was the name of his firstborn son, who died young.<sup>25</sup> If Qasim had lived, however, there would likely be no Shia or Sunni schism for Daesh to propagate because Qasim would have taken over at Mohammad’s death (instead of Abu Bakr). Mohammad had four daughters and four sons, all from his first wife Khadija, but only one child survived him—his daughter Fatima.<sup>26</sup> Fatima married Mohammad’s cousin Ali, later the fourth caliph, and they had two sons, Hassan and Hussein.

Mohammad fought in various battles, where he received some of the revelations that comprise the Quran. Details surrounding his death are controversial; numerous accounts attribute it to poisoned meat.<sup>27</sup> After Mohammad died, a rift developed between Fatima and her stepmother Aishah, as Fatima thought Ali should succeed Mohammad instead of Abu Bakr. This is where the word Shia comes from, meaning “followers of Ali.” This rift is still felt today in the Sunni-Shia schism. The Iranian al-Quds force commander, Qasim Suleymani, likely was named after Mohammad’s son who died, as the Shia revere his family members.

## The Quran

*You are incorrect. Every surah has the bismillah.<sup>28</sup>*

—Muslim military officer

As Daesh correctly stated in Dabiq magazine, many Islamic “people are ignorant of their religion and they thirst for those who can teach them and help them understand it.”<sup>29</sup> Daesh capitalizes on this ignorance in its propaganda, including audio and video statements, magazines, and chants called *nasheeds*. The study by

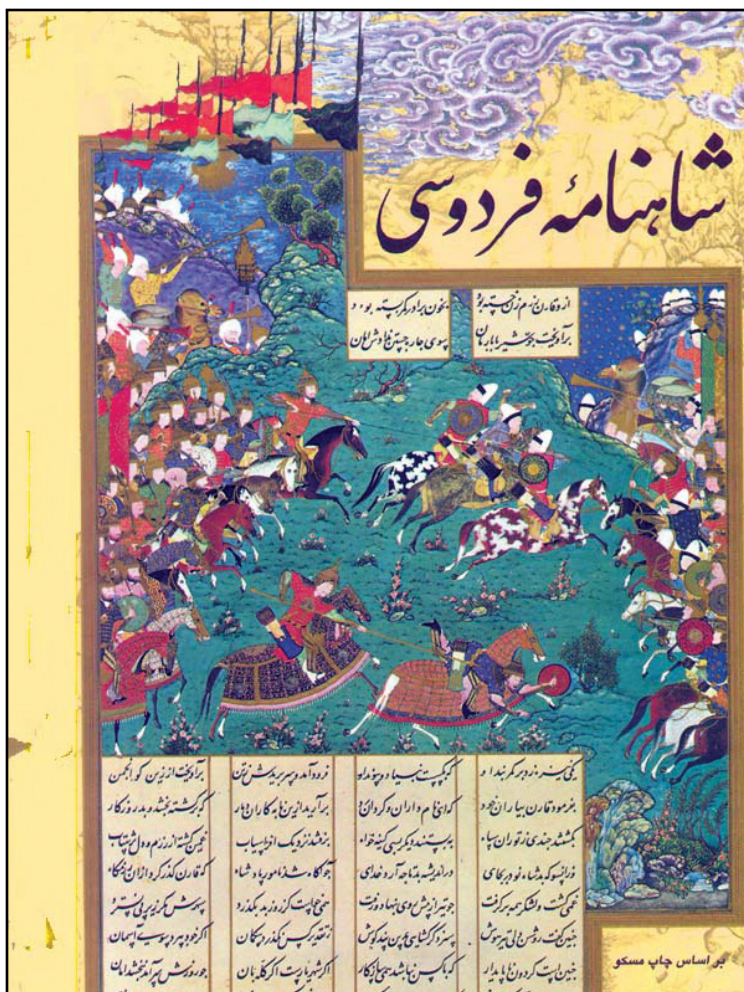


the Centre on Religion and Geopolitics found that 87 percent of jihadist propaganda included “justifications from the Quran, Hadith, or scholarship.”<sup>30</sup> For example, the study analyzed one statement that contained twenty-four Quranic references, with thirteen different *suras*, or chapters, mentioned.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, to understand Daesh, one must become familiar with the Quran, Islam’s holy book, which is believed to be the literal word of God.

According to Masood Farivar, a former Taliban leader, some Muslims do not know the meaning of the word *quran*, and some have expressed surprise to learn that it means to “read or recite.”<sup>32</sup> Some Muslims are unaware that one chapter in the Quran is missing the *bismillah* (an invocation meaning in the name of Allah, or God). As these examples suggest, the Quran is not an easy book to read or understand, and when translated, it loses the rhythmic quality for which it is famous. For example, the first sura, titled “The Opening” or “Al-Fatiha,” is recited by all Muslims. The verses rhyme, which adds additional significance to the words. Numerous *suras* begin with random letters, their meaning said to be known only to God. One such chapter begins with the letters, *alif*, *laam*, and *meem*, which in Quranic recitation is sung, with the letter and word *meem* rhyming with the word that precedes it, *raheem*.<sup>33</sup>

Another difficulty in understanding the Quran is that *suras* are arranged by length, not chronologically, with the longest *suras* at the beginning, except for “Al-Fatiha” being followed by the shortest. The ninth sura, believed to have been revealed shortly before Mohammad died, appears near the beginning of the Quran, while a sura about Qasim, which would have been revealed early, appears near the end.<sup>34</sup>

As stated earlier, numerous revelations came during or after key events in Islamic history, including various battles; therefore, readers wishing to understand the Quran should develop an understanding of Islamic history. As Hassan Hassan, coauthor of a book on Daesh, says, “when ISIS burns someone alive, they do it because someone in Islamic history did it.”<sup>35</sup> Many of



(Photo via Wikimedia Commons)

An image from a manuscript of the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings), considered the national epic of Greater Iran, depicts Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas leading the armies of the Rashidun caliphate during the Battle of al-Qādisiyyah.

the heinous acts Daesh has committed, including beheadings, drownings, and burning of individuals, have precedents in Islamic history.<sup>36</sup>

Daesh has designed its black flag based on one described in books about Islamic history. The original was called *Okab*, or Black Eagle, and was carried into battle in the days of Mohammad.<sup>37</sup> It was a “black flag ... bearing the inscription, ‘there is no God but God. Mahomet [Mohammad] is the messenger of God.’”<sup>38</sup> Ibn Ishaq, author of one of the earliest biographies of Mohammad, whom he sometimes calls the apostle, discusses it: “The apostle set out in the month of Ramadan. He gave the flag to Mus’ab .... The apostle was preceded by two black flags, one with Ali called al-Uqab [Okab] and the other with one of the Ansar.”<sup>39</sup> Ishaq writes, “The apostle said, ‘Tomorrow

I will give the flag to a man who loves Allah and his apostle.' Mohammad then tells Ali, 'Take this flag and go with it until God gives victory through you.'<sup>40</sup>

According to Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, many Twitter accounts of Daesh supporters display avatars of the black flag of Daesh.<sup>41</sup> Just as the original flag was used in the days of Mohammad to rally and unify Muslims, today Daesh seeks to do the same with its version. William McCants, director of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World at the Brookings Institution, reports that when the Daesh flag was introduced in 2007, its designers said, "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."<sup>42</sup>

## The Caliphate

*Some wrongly assume the imamate [religious leadership, by succession] to be one of the pillars of faith. If it were one of the pillars of the faith ... Mohammad would have appointed a representative, exactly as he had appointed Abu Bakr to represent him at prayer.*<sup>43</sup>

—Ibn Khaldun

The central pillar of the Daesh narrative is the idea of the new caliphate, which it announced the first day of Ramadan in June 2014.<sup>44</sup> While not a requirement of Islam, Daesh has declared it so.<sup>45</sup> The caliphate was never a religious duty. In fact, the Arabic word *khalifa*, which means successor, is used only twice in the Quran.<sup>46</sup> In the first use, scholars doubt whether the word khalifa was intended. Some believe the word was meant to be *khalifa*.<sup>47</sup> In the other, the word khalifa is used to refer to David: "O, David, surely We have made you a succeeding [literally, a caliph] (Messenger) in the earth, so judge among mankind with the truth."<sup>48</sup> It is not surprising then, that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, alleging himself an Islamic scholar of Quranic phonetics, would avoid referring to these passages to justify the new caliphate or the supposed Muslim duty to pledge allegiance to the caliph. The Quran provides no justification for his claims.<sup>49</sup>

Many caliphs in Islamic history have been assassinated, with the original Abu Bakr being one of few exceptions. After serving two years, he died, and he was succeeded by Omar. Omar served ten years before he was killed, followed by Uthman, who served twelve years before he too was murdered. The fourth caliph,



(Photo via Wikimedia Commons)

Daesh fighters holding weapons stand with the terrorist group's flags February 2015 in Anbar, Iraq.



Ali, served five years before he was killed. Daesh's leaders, no doubt aware of the high attrition rate of caliphs in Islamic history and worried about the probability of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's demise, announced in the first issue of Dabiq magazine, "We will strike the neck of anyone—whoever he may be—that attempts to usurp his [referring to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi] leadership."<sup>50</sup>

## Shia, Alawites, and the Twelfth Imam

*O Sunnis of Iraq, the time has come for you to learn the lesson of the past ... that nothing will work with the rafidah except slicing their throats. They conceal their hatred, enmity and rage towards the Sunnis ... they trick and deceive them.*<sup>51</sup>

—Daesh spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani

Like the Sunni, the Shia also believe in the figure called the Mahdi. The Shia believe the Mahdi has appeared and will return as the twelfth imam.<sup>52</sup> Former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was reported as saying that the real ruler of Iran was the twelfth imam and government policy should be guided by hastening his return.<sup>53</sup> Vali Nasr, writing about the Shia revival in 2007, reports that Muqtadir al-Sadr, the Iraqi Shia cleric who gained prominence after the fall of Saddam Hussein, named his army the Mahdi army to indicate "that his cause was that of the Twelfth Imam."<sup>54</sup> According to a Pew Research Center study conducted in 2011–2012, 72 percent of Muslims surveyed in Iraq believed they would live to see the return of the Mahdi.<sup>55</sup>

To understand Daesh's actions in Syria, one needs to understand the deeply rooted animosity between the ruling Alawites and the Syrian Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, or *Ikhwan*.<sup>56</sup> The Syrian government, headed by Bashar al-Assad, the son of Hafez al-Assad, has maintained control in Syria by brutally repressing the Sunni majority living there. After the Iranian Revolution (1979), Syrians "took to the streets ... demanding an Islamic state—one not controlled by infidel Alawites."<sup>57</sup> The Ikhwan tried to assassinate then President Hafez al-Assad and seized the Syrian town of Hama. Hafez al-Assad responded by destroying the town and killing twenty thousand members of the Ikhwan.<sup>58</sup> Today, Bashar al-Assad

carries the same animosity toward the Ikhwan, claiming that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan "belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood ideology" and is "very fanatical and that's why he still supports ISIS."<sup>59</sup>

The Assads belong to the Alawite sect, which believes in a sort of trinity.<sup>60</sup> The word *alawi* means "upper, heavenly, or celestial." While Alawites claim to be Muslim, with the name derived from the name Ali, Hafez al-Assad reportedly said, "I'm not Moslem. I belong to the Allawi faith .... The Allawi religion is a very complicated business."<sup>61</sup> According to Sam Dagher, "Alawites believe that Imam Ali ... was an incarnation of God, who revealed himself in six other people before Ali's seventh-century caliphate."<sup>62</sup> In the eyes of Daesh, the Shia and Alawites are apostates; this is why Daesh is committed to their destruction.

## The Return of the Mahdi

*In the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful, here is the awaited Mahdi. ... Pay allegiance to brother Mohammed Abdullah al-Qurayshi.*<sup>63</sup>

—Juhayman ibn Muhammad ibn Sayf al-Otaybi

While Daesh clings to the prophetic end-of-days imagery, believing the end of days imminent, similar claims were also made on the last day of Ramadan in 1979, when gunshots broke the early morning silence at Islam's holiest mosque in Mecca. Snipers fired from the minarets, killing scores of worshippers.<sup>64</sup> The bloodbath continued for two weeks as Saudi soldiers refused to retake the holy ground, citing religious concerns, and Saudi officials sought guidance in hadith books.

Saudi soldiers thought they would go to hell if they tried to retake the mosque because the Quran expressly forbids fighting there.<sup>65</sup> The gunmen, Saudi youth familiar with a prophecy involving the Mahdi, believed they were ushering in the end of days.<sup>66</sup> They believed the Mahdi had arrived, as a man with attributes of the Mahdi had appeared. The Saudi government checked old hadith books to determine if the individual really was the Mahdi, and after determining that he was not, issued a *fatwa*, or religious ruling, giving Saudi soldiers the religious authority to retake the mosque. Despite the



ruling, many soldiers were still unsure if they might go to hell for their actions. Today, more than half the world's Muslims believe they will live to see the return of the Mahdi.<sup>67</sup>

## Defeating Daesh

*Interpreting a single word to include the numerous, non-contradictory meanings that it can carry is without a doubt the correct approach here.*<sup>68</sup>

—Article in Dabiq magazine

Words and ideas are the most effective weapons of Daesh. It uses them to recruit and to spread its message in the domain of deen, where it enjoys freedom of movement. Therefore, this article gives several recommendations for countering Daesh, not with physical weapons, but with words and ideas, which we could use more effectively than any physical weapon.

To start, we should refer to the “Islamic State” as Daesh. This simple word expresses the organization's true identity, as a group of brutal blasphemers who bastardize Islam. We should refer to Daesh's leader not by the name he prefers, but by the name he deserves: *ad Dajjal*.<sup>69</sup> This name represents an evil figure Muslims fear will one day appear as a false messenger.

Next, our messaging should expose the abundance of religious fraud in Daesh's jihadist propaganda, most of which justifies fighting based on religious authorities. Raising doubts about tenuous religious rationales might dissuade potential recruits who want to adhere to their holy scriptures. Daesh's propaganda frequently mentions jihad—the report by the Centre on Religion and Geopolitics found jihad mentioned in 71 percent of the propaganda studied.<sup>70</sup> However, like the Saudi troops who hesitated in 1979, potential Daesh recruits and current Daesh members might think twice if they knew the sura on which they rely for authority to wage jihad is missing God's invocation, and if they thought they might be sent to hell instead of paradise for their actions.<sup>71</sup> We should call their attention to the fact that the ninth sura is the only sura missing the bismillah.

A Quranic reference that does not help Daesh, and one they have taken pains to avoid, is the express prohibition on suicide, or *intihar*.<sup>72</sup> Again illustrating how words matter, Daesh avoids the word *intihar* to describe suicide missions,

and instead it uses the term *inghamaasi*, roughly translated as “to submerge, or to go deep into something.”<sup>73</sup> Narratives focusing on the Quran's explicit prohibition of *intihar*, along with the omission of the bismillah in the ninth sura, are powerful refutations that should be used to counter the Daesh narrative.

Islamic history should also be used to undercut the Daesh narrative that says infidels should be killed. In fact, the family of Mohammad's first wife Khadija were Christian, and some refused to convert.<sup>74</sup> Even Mohammad's uncle and great protector Abu Talib refused to convert to Islam, despite his great love and affection for his nephew.<sup>75</sup> However, none of them were killed for their refusal to convert to Islam. Additionally, the positive treatment of Christians at the time of Caliph Mansur, Harun's grandfather, is exemplified by Mansur's relationship with his Christian doctor, Georgius Bakhtishua. Mansur revered Bakhtishua, naming him the new founder of Baghdad's medical school, and he and his family were allowed to practice their religion “for more than 300 years.”<sup>76</sup>

Nasheeds (or anashid) should be used to counter Daesh, as they are extremely effective in recruiting. In 2011, a shooter who killed U.S. military personnel at the Frankfurt airport was listening to a nasheed on his way to the airport, and at his trial said, “It made me really angry,” referring to the lyrics of the nasheed.<sup>77</sup> Nasheeds could be just as effective in turning people away from Daesh.

Bombs and bullets alone cannot defeat Daesh. To defeat these terrorists, we must engage them in the domain of deen where they maintain freedom of movement, and we must counter words with words. We need to use the same weapons, including knowledge of Islam, Islamic history, and language, to defeat them. Unfortunately, U.S. soldiers are seldom, if ever, instructed on the proper use of these weapons, and until they are, Daesh will continue to dominate the domain of deen—its primary source of power. ■

*The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not represent the views of the Department of Defense, U.S. Special Operations Command, or the U.S. Army. The author gratefully acknowledges Col. Gene Del Bianco, U.S. Army Reserve, for providing feedback during the development of this manuscript.*

*Maj. Theresa Ford, U.S. Army, is a legal advisor with U.S. Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. She holds a BA from Thomas Edison State College, an MA in international relations from St. Mary's University, and a JD from the University of Maine. She studied Arabic in Egypt and conflict resolution in Israel as part of her graduate studies. She deployed during Operation Iraqi Freedom and served as a member of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands Program in Operation Enduring Freedom.*

## Notes

**Epigraph.** Thomas Hegghammer, "The Soft Power of Militant Jihad," *New York Times* online, 18 December 2015, accessed 19 January 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/20/opinion/sunday/militant-jihads-softer-side.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/20/opinion/sunday/militant-jihads-softer-side.html?_r=0). *Anashid* is a plural form of *nasheed*, or "Islamic devotional music." See also Souad Mekhennet, "German Officials Alarmed by Ex-Rapper's New Message: Jihad," *New York Times* online, 31 August 2011, accessed 19 January 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/01/world/europe/01jihadi.html>.

1. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Marine Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, 1 December 2015, C-SPAN video recording, "Military Operations against ISIS," accessed 19 January 2016, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?401241-1/ashton-carter-joseph-dunford-testimony-military-operations-isis>. Dunford identifies Daesh's sources of power as "existence of the caliphate ... their narrative ... [and] manpower."

2. Ashton Carter, "Statement on the U.S. Military Strategy in the Middle East and the Counter-ISIL Campaign before the Senate Armed Services Committee," Secretary of Defense testimony, 27 October 2015, accessed 19 January 2016, <http://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech-View/Article/626037/statement-on-the-us-military-strategy-in-the-middle-east-and-the-counter-isis-c>; Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC, February 2015), 2, accessed 19 January 2016, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf).

3. Associated Press, "Is it IS, ISIS, ISIL or maybe Daesh?" *Ynet News* online, 12 September 2014, accessed 19 January 2016, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4570385,00.html>.

4. J. Milton Cowan, ed., *Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Urbana: Spoken Language Services, Inc., 1994), 325. *Daesh* is based on the Arabic acronym for Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, *al-dawlat al-Islamiya al Iraq wa ash-shams*.

5. "British House of Commons Debate on Combating ISIS in Syria," C-SPAN, 2 December 2015, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?401458-1/british-house-commons-authorizes-airstrikes-syria-397223>.

6. The prophet Mohammad, quoted and translated in William Muir, *The Life of Mohammad* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1923), 485, accessed 28 January 2016, (<https://ia802606.us.archive.org/4/items/lifeofmohammadfr00muir/lifeofmohammadfr00muir.pdf>).

7. *Hans Wehr Dictionary*, 85. The Arabic root letters *b*, *k*, and *r* relate to the subject of virginity, with *bakara* meaning virginity and

*bikr* meaning virgin. The word *bakr*, however, means young camel; the words for virgin and young camel are spelled the same in Arabic. The only difference between the two is the unwritten short vowels, or diacritics, that were added long after Mohammad's day. The name *young camel* was likely a nickname for Aishah, who was a virgin.

8. Ali Hashem, "The Many Names of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi," *Al-Monitor* online, 23 March 2015, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/isis-baghdadi-islamic-state-caliph-many-names-al-qaeda.html#>. See also Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 197.

9. Abu Omar, quoted in Hashem, "The Many Names of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi." See also Mark Sykes, *The Caliphs' Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire* (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1915), 221, accessed 3 January 2016, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.Sb57529;view=1up;seq=250>.

10. William McCants, "The Believer: How an Introvert with a Passion for Religion and Soccer Became Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi Leader of the Islamic State," *The Brookings Essay* online, 1 September 2015, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/essays/2015/thebeliever>.

11. From a hadith reported by Abu Dawud from Muawiyah, cited in Dabiq 9, Sha'Ban 1436 [May 2015], 53, accessed 21 January 2016, <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-issue%2B9-they-plot-and-allah-plots-sex-slavery.pdf>. Dabiq magazine uses the Islamic calendar.

12. Charlie Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy* (London: Quilliam Foundation, July 2015), 30, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/the-virtual-caliphate-understanding-islamic-states-propaganda-strategy.pdf>. "The emphasis on eschatology lends urgency to the IS narrative and incentivizes other jihadists—individuals or groups—to join the organization." See also Erin Marie Saltman, *Till Martyrdom Do Us Part: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon* (2015), 31, accessed 3 January 2016, [http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Till\\_Martyrdom\\_Do\\_Us\\_Part\\_Gender\\_and\\_the\\_ISIS\\_Phenomenon.pdf](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf). Saltman reports that a female recruit said, "I couldn't sit back one second. I was waiting for the day Khilafah returned."

13. Saltman, *Till Martyrdom Do Us Part*, 17.

14. Emmam El-Badawy, Milo Comerford, and Peter Welby, *Inside the Jihadi Mind* (London: Tony Blair Faith Foundation, October 2015), accessed 1 February 2016, <http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Inside%20the%20Jihadi%20Mind.pdf>, 4 and 56.



15. Quran 5:9, Muhammad Mahmud Ghali, trans., in *Towards Understanding the Ever-Glorious Quran* (Cairo: Dar An-Nashr Liljamiat, 2008). "Allah has promised the ones who have believed and done deeds of righteousness (that) they will have forgiveness and a magnificent reward." All English citations to the Quran are from Ghali.
16. Quran, 2:25, 4:13, 10:9, 52:20, and 56:22; *Hans-Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, s.v. "hourī": "virgin of paradise."
17. Muhammed Ibn Ismaiel Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), Vol. 4, Book 56, 63.
18. Quran, 32:5, 70:4, 55:43–44, and 99:1.
19. Sahih Muslim, Book 41, hadith 6924, accessed 22 January 2016, <http://www.searchtruth.com/>. "Abu Hurairah reported Allah's Messenger as saying: 'The Last Hour would not come until the Romans would land at al-Amaq or in Dabiq.'" The majority of Dabiq citations normally are from Bukhari, whose hadith collection is considered to be one of the most reliable. Bukhari's hadith collection, however, makes no mention of a place named Dabiq.
20. Quran 57:3. The final day is referred to as *al youm al Akhir*.
21. Nabia Abbott, *Two Queens of Baghdad: Mother and Wife of Harun al-Rashid* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946), vii, accessed 20 January 2016, [http://oi.uchicago.edu/sites/oi.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/shared/docs/two\\_queens\\_baghdad.pdf](http://oi.uchicago.edu/sites/oi.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/shared/docs/two_queens_baghdad.pdf).
22. Ibid., 162.
23. Sykes, *The Caliphs' Last Heritage*, 221.
24. An unnamed critic of Mohammad, in Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'an* (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2001), 322.
25. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 25.
26. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 933–34. Other sources confirm four daughters, but accounts vary on the number of sons who died.
27. Muir, *Life of Mohammad*, 481. Mohammad and his companion, Bishr, were given meat from a woman in the Jewish village of Kheiber. While Mohammad did not swallow the meat, he said it tasted strange and asked the woman if she poisoned him. She said she did, for if he ate the meat and survived, she would know he was a prophet. Bishr died after eating the meat. See also Ibn Kathir, trans. Trevor Le Gassick, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad: Al-Sira al-Nabawiyya*, Vol. III, (Lebanon: Garnet, 2005), 286. On his deathbed, Mohammad mentioned the poisoned meat as the cause of his affliction.
28. Conversation between the author and a Muslim military officer attending a U.S. military school in 2012. He made the statement after I mentioned that the ninth sura was missing the *bismillah*. After checking his Quran, he said that he learned something about his religion.
29. "The Return of the Khilafah," Dabiq 1, Ramadan 1435 [July 2014], 11, accessed 3 January 2016, <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>.
30. El-Badawy, Comerford, and Welby, *Inside the Jihadi Mind*, 5.
31. Ibid.
32. Masood Farivar, *Confessions of a Mullah Warrior* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), 97.
33. Quran 2:1.
34. Quran 108.
35. Hassan Hassan, "Book Discussion on ISIS," C-SPAN, 12 March 2015, accessed 19 January 2016, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?324789-1/hassan-hassan-isis-inside-army-terror>.
36. William Muir, *The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline, and Fall* (Oxford: The Religious Tract Society, 1891), 60, accessed 28 January 2016, [https://books.google.com/books?id=jQZBAAAYAAJ&pg=PR3&source=gbs\\_selected\\_pages&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=jQZBAAAYAAJ&pg=PR3&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false). "The persistent opposition of the Christian Bedouins now led Khalid into an unwise severity that embittered them against him. Their leader was beheaded in front of the city walls, and every adult male of the garrison led forth and put to death; while the women and children were made over to the soldiers or sold into slavery."
37. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 375.
38. Washington Irving, *Lives of the Successors of Mahomet* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1850), 147.
39. Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. A. Guillaume (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 292.
40. Ibid., 514.
41. Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, *ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa* (Washington, DC: George Washington University, Program on Extremism, December 2015), 23, accessed 20 January 2016, <https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/ISIS%20in%20America%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>. Vidino and Hughes also mention avatars of lions and green birds.
42. William McCants, "How ISIS Got Its Flag," *Atlantic* online, 22 September 2015, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/isis-flag-apocalypse/406498/>.
43. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 169.
44. Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, "The Islamic State's First Year," *Al-Monitor* online, 25 June 2015, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse>.
45. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in his first and only public appearance and sermon in Arabic, translated into English, in *Q&A with Jessica Stern*, C-SPAN, 24 March 2015, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?324982-1/qa-jessica-stern>. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi says, "After long years of jihad and perseverance fighting the enemies of Allah, Allah has enabled them to accomplish their goal. Thus, they hastened to declare the establishment of their Caliphate and the appointment of an imam. This is a duty incumbent among Muslims .... Muslims who ignore this duty are committing a sin."
46. Quran 2:30 and 38:26.
47. Nabih Amin Faris, "Khalifa or Khaliqa," *The Moslem World, Khalifa or Khaliqa* XXIV (2) (April 1934), 183. The only way to tell the difference between khalifa and khaliqa in Arabic is by the number of dots that appear over the characters equivalent to "f" and "q." Since the Arabic alphabet lacks short vowels, diacritic markings were added later, as there was often confusion about the meaning of words.
48. Quran 38:26.
49. "The Return of the Khilafah," Dabiq 1, Ramadan 1435 [July 2014], 29, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>. Dabiq was silent regarding Quranic authority to support the creation of the caliphate or the Muslim duty to pledge allegiance to the caliph. Instead, Daesh relied on hadith.
50. "The Return of the Khilafah," Dabiq 1, 29.
51. Statement by Daesh spokesman al Adnani, 22 September 2014, cited in El-Badawy, Comerford, and Welby, *Inside the Jihadi Mind*, 35.

52. Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 23.

53. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, then president of Iran, as reported in Richard Ernsberger Jr., Ladane Nasser, and Alan Isenberg, "Religion Versus Reality: Who Is This Man—a Mystic, a Bumbling Political Novice or an Imminent Threat to Iran's Established Order?" *Newsweek International*, Atlantic Edition, 12 December 2005; and Kamal Tehrani, "Majera-e Shegeftangiz-e Nameh-e Moaven-e Aval-e Rais Jamhour be Imam Zaman" [The Vice President's Astonishing Letter to the Twelfth Imam], *Entekhab*, 16 October 2005, <http://www.entekhab.ir/display/?ID=6760&PH-PSESSID=b24d119ca808c4c1bfdb21b173a35df4>. Ahmadinejad instructed "his cabinet to sign a symbolic pledge of allegiance to the Twelfth Imam."

54. Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, 130.

55. Pew Research Center, *The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity*, 9 August 2012, chap. 3, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-executive-summary/>. In Iraq, 1,416 Muslims were surveyed throughout all eighteen provinces.

56. Hassan Hassan and Michael Weiss, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts, 2015), 135. Alawites are a "mostly cultural offshoot of the Shia, who constitute between 8 percent and 15 percent of the population ... ruling over the Sunnis, who constitute close to 75 percent." See also Patrick Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* (London: University of California Press, Ltd., 1988), 8, who states that Alawis "share with other Shi'a the belief that Ali, the prophet Mohammad's cousin and son-in-law, was his rightful heir" and "push reverence for the wronged Ali to extreme lengths by seeing him infused with divine essence."

57. Robert Baer, *Sleeping With the Devil* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), 94.

58. Ibid., 103.

59. Bashar al-Assad, interview with Jonathan Tepperman, "Syria's President Speaks: A Conversation with Bashar al-Assad," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2015, 65.

60. Baer, *Sleeping With the Devil*, 93. Ilene Prusher, "What the ISIS Flag Says About the Militant Group," *Time* online, 9 September 2014, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://time.com/3311665/isis-flag-iraq-syria/>. Daesh, ironically, appears to have adopted a sort of trinity, as the three words inside the white circle on their flag read, from top to bottom, "Allah, Rasool, Mohammad," meaning, "God, messenger, Mohammad." The words along the top part of the flag are the *shahada*, or declaration of faith. The word order inside the circle is skewed, as it does not follow the order of the rest of the *shahada*, which says, "Mohammad is God's messenger."

61. Hafez al-Assad, in Eli Ben-Hanan, *Our Man in Damascus: Elie Cohn* (Bnei Brak: Steimatzky, 1969), 46. Ben-Hanan reports that Hafez Assad made these comments at the Syrian Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to Elie Cohn, an Israeli spy whom he later executed. Hafez Assad would later try to remove a provision in the Syrian constitution that required the president be Muslim, a fact that seems consistent with his statement that he was not a Muslim.

62. Sam Dagher, "Syria's Alawites: The People Behind Assad," *Wall Street Journal* online, 25 June 2015, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/syrias-alawites-the-people-behind-assad-1435166941>.

63. Juhayman ibn Muhammad ibn Sayf al-Otaybi, during a militant takeover of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, quoted and translated in Yaroslav Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca: The 1979 Uprising at Islam's Holiest Shrine* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), 69. Here again, lineage to the Quraysh tribe was claimed by the alleged Mahdi.

64. Ibid., 224.

65. Ibid., 85–86; Quran 2:191.

66. Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 257–58. Sunni Muslims believe that "at the end of time a man from the family (of the prophet) will without fail make his appearance .... He will be called the Mahdi. Following him, the Antichrist will appear .... After the Mahdi, Jesus will descend and kill the Antichrist. Or, Jesus will descend together with the Mahdi, and help him kill the Antichrist. In "The Return of the Khilafah," Dabiq 1, 4, Daesh refers to Jesus, who "will descend and lead them. When the enemy of Allah sees him, he will melt as salt melts in water."

67. *The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity*, chap. 3.

68. "The Return of the Khilafah," Dabiq 1, 25.

69. *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Book 97, hadith 7408, speaks of the Dajjal: "Allah did not send any Prophet but that he warned his nation of the one-eyed liar (Ad-Dajjal). He is one-eyed while your Lord (Allah) is not one-eyed. The word 'Kafir' (disbeliever) is written between his two eyes." While the Daesh leader appeared without glasses in his only video appearance, he wears glasses in a prison photo from Camp Bucca.

According to Najwa bin Laden, Omar bin Laden, and Jean Sasson, *Growing up bin Laden* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), 159–160, it was reported that Osama bin Laden had an eye injury he tried to hide. Similarly, the Daesh leader likely does not want to show followers any sign of imperfection or weakness.

70. El-Badawy, Comerford, and Welby, *Inside the Jihadi Mind*, 5.

71. Quran 9. While some scholars believe this sura was originally part of a different sura, this theory contradicts the fundamental Islamic belief that each word in the Quran is of divine origin and the Quran is unchanged.

72. Quran 4:29.

73. El-Badawy, Comerford, and Welby, *Inside the Jihadi Mind*, 20.

74. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 36. Khadija's cousins Othman and Waraka were Christian and did not convert.

75. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 106. Another uncle that refused to convert to Islam is mentioned in the Quran, at sura 111.

76. John Young, "Medical Missions in Yemen," *The Moslem World* XII (1) (January 1922), 62–63, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044021005020;view=1up;seq=9>.

77. Mekhennet, *German Officials Alarmed by Ex-Rapper's New Message: Jihad*. The Frankfurt shooter was inspired by a nasheed, recorded by a German ex-rapper named Cuspert who joined Daesh.