The Crusades in the Modern World

Engaging the Crusades, Volume Two

Edited by Mike Horswell and Akil N. Awan

1 Weaponising the crusades

Justifying terrorism and political violence

Akil N. Awan

On 29 October 2010, a young woman entered the FedEx courier company's Sana'a office and dispatched a parcel to a synagogue in Chicago, Illinois. Contained within the package was a potent explosive device disguised as a printer cartridge, designed to detonate over U.S. airspace. Fortuitously, the bomb was safely intercepted en route at a scheduled stopover. Responsibility for the thwarted attack was quickly claimed by the Yemen-based franchise of the al-Qaeda terrorist network, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

Lost amidst the flurry of security activity, and the understandably palpable sense of relief over the disrupted plot, however, was one incongruous overlooked detail. The package was addressed to a man who had been dead for over 800 years. The bomb's intended recipient was 'Reynald Krak',[1] a pseudonym for Raynald of Châtillon – the infamous twelfth-century Frankish knight, who notoriously plundered Muslim caravans and killed Muslim pilgrims, even in periods of truce during the Second Crusade. The Muslim scholar, Baha ad-Din ibn Shaddad, renowned for his biography of Saladin and a contemporary of Raynald, alluded to his notoriety by describing him as a 'monstrous infidel and terrible oppressor'.[2] Indeed, in the wake of the Battle of Hattin (1187), the victorious Saladin himself differentiated his treatment of crusader captives on the basis of their reputations. Whereas Guy of Lusignan was magnanimously offered a cup of iced rose water, the widely despised Raynald was beheaded by Saladin's own hand. In the centuries since Hattin, Raynald became a reviled caricature of cruelty and violence in both the East and the West; a bogeyman, personifying the crusades' enduring legacy of Christian-Muslim enmity.[3]

Raynald of Châtillon may have been dead for close to a millennium, but the ghost of his memory had been revived to chilling effect. AQAP's glossy English-language magazine, *Inspire*, explained the group's strange choice of 'target' for its terrorist attack:

> We are fighting a war against American tyranny. This is a new Crusade waged by the West against Islam. […] This current battle fought by the West is not an isolated battle but is a continuation of a long history of aggression by the West against the Muslim world. In order to revive and bring back this history we listed the name of Reynald Krak […] who was one of the worst and most treacherous of the Crusade's leaders. […] Today we are facing a coalition of Crusaders and Zionists and […] this operation is a response to the Crusaders aggression against the Muslims.[4]

Terrorism, as Alex Schmid and Jenny De Graaf's seminal work on the subject explains, is best understood, if it is viewed in the first instance as communication, rather than as mere violence.[5] Thus, AQAP's decision to resurrect a long-dead crusader as their imaginary interlocutor in their political communication with the West should not have surprised anyone – particularly as the crusades have long symbolised *the* seminal conflict that defined the troubled relationship between Western Christendom and the Muslim World; a toxic legacy that continues to the present day. This chapter explores the ways in which the problematic legacy of the crusades has been employed by jihadists today to further their political aims, foment social divisions and ultimately legitimise violence and terrorism.

Constructing grand narratives

Central to the worldview of many extremist groups is the presence of what Jean-François Lyotard referred to as a grand or meta-narrative.[6] Grand narratives are overarching, totalising accounts or meta-discourses, which provide ideologies with a legitimating philosophy of history. Essentially, these accounts claim to connect and give meaning to disparate histori-cal events, experiences and phenomena by appealing to some universal, overarching schema. Under the rubric of the grand narrative, extremists work to construct stories that allow them to connect their imagined past, present and future, thus enabling them to make sense of the world around them and locate their place within history. In the process, these narra-tives function to legitimise power, authority and broader worldviews, of-ten hiding political motives and acts, such as violence, behind the façade of lofty ideals.

   Jihadists have long sought to construct and deploy a particularly tendentious grand narrative in order to support and validate their worldview. One of the most significant and recurring refrains within this narrative is the construction of the crusades – not simply as a series

of eight historical campaigns that took place between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries – but rather as a central existential threat; a label ubiquitously applied to any form of Western aggression and encroachment against the Islamic world throughout history.

At first glance, this may seem surprising, considering that the early crusading expeditions were largely neglected by contemporary Muslim chroniclers, who viewed the invaders as primitive, uncouth, barbarians who posed little concern.[7] Indeed, the Islamic world's initial response to the crusades was one of 'apathy, compromise and preoccupation with internal problems'.[8] Moreover, beyond the actual events themselves, the memory of the crusades played a considerably less significant part in Islamic conceptions of history from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries, than is often assumed.[9] This should not surprise us, considering that the crusades had not been of the Muslims' making, and which on balance, the crusaders had lost; the Muslim world had ultimately proved successful in repelling the crusades, reclaiming any territorial gains made by Western Christendom and having destroyed any lingering crusader presence along the Levantine Mediterranean coast. Indeed, throughout this entire period, there was no Arabic word for the crusades per se,[10] and the crusades were simply subsumed within a broader history of recurrent waves of aggression by the *Faranj* or Franks.

It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that the terms *harb al-salib* (the war of the cross) and *al-salibiyyun* (crusaders) entered the Arabic lexicon and, even then, only through an appropriation of European terms encountered in European history books. This development was largely in response to an assertive, expansionist Europe who now threatened the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ottoman empire, plunging it into crisis. The first Arabic history of the crusades, *al-Akhbar al-saniyya fi'l-hurub al-salibiyya* (*Great Accounts in the Crusading Wars*), penned by the Egyptian historian Sayyid Ali al-Hariri was not published until 1899. Al-Hariri echoing the sentiments of the earlier French historian, Joseph François Michaud, viewed the crusades as a forerunner to European colonialism. It was precisely at the moment that Michaud had been writing his seminal six-volume *Histoire des Croisades*, that France had embarked on its colonising invasion of Algeria in 1830. It was in this context that both politicians and historians began to proudly identify the new colonising movement and its *mission civilisatrice* with the crusades of old.[11]

The Ottoman Caliph, Sultan Abdul Hamid II (r. 1876–1909), presciently recognising the political utility of this framing language,

lamented the new European 'crusade' against the Ottoman empire – a view al-Hariri went on to endorse in his book:

> The sovereigns of Europe nowadays attack our Sublime Empire in a manner bearing a great resemblance to the deeds of those people [the crusaders] in bygone times. Our most glorious sultan, Abdul Hamid II, has rightly remarked that Europe is now carrying out a Crusade against us in the form of a political campaign.[12]

In the century that followed, the moribund Ottoman empire was dismembered in the wake of the First World War, the caliphate was abolished, and virtually every Muslim majority country was either colonised outright or came under the sphere of influence of European powers. Even after the end of European empire in the latter half of the twentieth century, unequal power dynamics continued to dominate the relationships between the Islamic world and their old colonial masters, whose influence had now also been bolstered by an increasingly assertive U.S.A. It is in this context that we might begin to understand the potency of crusading discourse in the wider jihadist meta-narrative. For jihadists, the memory of the crusades lives on as the clearest example of an assertive, belligerent Christianity, an early harbinger of aggression and imperialism of the Christian West to come.[13]

The Egyptian radical, Said Qutb, often regarded as the leading theorist-architect of salafi-jihadism,[14] was the first to systematically invoke the crusades within the broader Islamist grand narrative. Born into the heady political milieu of a British-occupied Egypt in 1906, Qutb witnessed first-hand, the subjugation of both his native country, and the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, being ravaged by unchecked European hegemony. Seething in humiliation, he wrote of European colonialism as nothing more than a mask for the enduring 'crusading spirit':[15]

> But from that time [of the Crusaders] to this, [Islam] has to contend with ferocious enemies of the same spirit as the Crusaders, enemies both open and hidden. The spirit of the Crusades, though perhaps in a milder form, still hangs over Europe; and that civilisation in its dealings with the Islamic world still occupies a position that bears clear traces of that genocidal force. The Crusader spirit that runs in the blood of all Occidentals […] colors their thinking, [and] is responsible for their imperialistic fear of the spirit of Islam and for their efforts to crush the strength of Islam.[16]

Al-Qaeda and the 'Zionist-Crusader' enemy

Virtually, every Islamist radical since Qutb has adopted this framing vis-à-vis the crusades, including, and most significantly, al-Qaeda. Consequently, the outmoded nineteenth-century paradigm drawing an equivalency between the crusades and European colonialism only survives principally within the twentieth- and twenty-first-centuries jihadist mind-set and grand narrative. In a letter to Al-Jazeera in November 2001, bin Laden wrote:

> Is it a single, unrelated event, or is it part of a long series of Crusader wars against the Islamic world? Since World War One, which ended over 83 years ago, the entire Islamic world has fallen under the Crusader banners, under the British, French, and Italian governments. They divided up the whole world between them, and Palestine fell into the hands of the British.[17]

For these groups, all contemporary conflicts raging in the Muslim world, from the 'War on Terror' to ethno-nationalist conflicts, are refracted through the prism of a wider historical global attack on Islam and Muslims by a belligerent 'Zionist-Crusader Alliance'. As bin Laden claimed in 1996:

> The people of Islam had suffered from aggression, iniquity and injustice imposed on them by the Zionist-Crusaders alliance and their collaborators […]. Their blood was spilled in Palestine and Iraq. […] Massacres in Tajikistan, Burma, Kashmir, Assam, Philippine, Fatani, Ogadin, Somalia, Eritrea, Chechnya and in Bosnia-Herzegovina took place, massacres that send shivers in the body and shake the conscience.[18]

The distillation of a common enemy from this diverse array of geopolitical conflicts and actors, as an anachronistic 'Zionist-Crusader Alliance', has been central to the jihadist aim of presenting a Manichean, us-and-them, dichotomy. Indeed, one of al-Qaeda's earliest and most important statements to the outside world in 1998 was presented under the auspices of the *World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders*. The 'World Islamic Front' in fact represented no such thing, and in addition to bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri was constituted of three relatively unimportant leaders from Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh, but nevertheless represented a

self-aggrandising projection of how al-Qaeda wished to see themselves and be seen by others.

In response to this 'Zionist-Crusader' assault, the jihadists claimed not only to have awakened the global Muslim community of belief, or *Ummah*, to the existential threat posed by the neo-crusaders but also to serve as the sole and crucial vanguard, helping mobilise Muslim audiences to respond to this historic enemy in kind: 'Our goal is for our nation to unite in the face of the Christian crusade. This is the fiercest battle. Muslims have never faced anything bigger than this'.[19] Crusader rhetoric has been central to the construction of jihadists' own self-perceptions too. In facing this enemy, jihadists have long sought to portray themselves as chivalrous medieval knights, at the head of the vanguard, heroically resisting these new incursions into the Muslim heartlands by the 'neo-crusaders'. The appeal to the valiant holy warrior or chivalrous knight is a recurring trope in much jihadist literature, with Ayman al-Zawahiri's famous text, *Fursan Taht Rayah Al-Nabi* (*Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*), written around 2001, representing one of the earliest and most important examples.[20]

The potency of the jihadist's alluringly simple meta-narrative has been bolstered by the stark and unflinching certainty of its interpretational framework that has remained remarkably coherent and consistent over time.[21] Some have even argued that al-Qaeda has been eminently successful in persuading Muslim audiences to accept their distorted grand narratives and historical revisionism.[22] Indeed, even their ideological opponents have recognised the jihadists manifest success in promulgating this historicised reading of contemporary events, with Michael Scheuer, the ex-head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) 'bin Laden unit', referring to Osama bin Laden as a 'modern Saladin […] [who] makes brilliant use of the intimacy of Muslims with Islamic history'.[23]

But possibly the greatest strength of the jihadists meta-narrative is that their Manichean worldview of believers and infidels, of jihad and crusade, is reflected, and indeed inadvertently corroborated, by the equally diametrically opposing dichotomy offered by their opponents, from the infamous Bush dictum 'you're either with us or against us in the fight against terror',[24] to Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' thesis.[25] However, perhaps nothing has epitomised this reciprocity of legitimation better than President George W. Bush's infamous and unfortunate characterisation of the 'War in Terror' as a new 'crusade'. Choosing to adopt overtly religious rhetoric shortly after 9/11, he

vowed to 'rid the world of evil-doers', cautioning that 'this crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while'.[26] In response, bin Laden leapt at the chance to employ his opponent's words in validating his own worldview:

> Bush stated that the world has to be divided in two: Bush and his supporters, and any country that doesn't get into the global crusade is with the terrorists. Bush said it in his own words: "crusade". When Bush says that, they try to cover up for him, then he said he didn't mean it. He said "crusade". Bush divided the world into two: "either with us or with terrorism". Bush is the leader; he carries the big cross and walks.[27]

Bin Laden returned once again to this incongruous synergy in his 2004 *Message to the American People*, arguing that 'it seems as if we and the White House are on the same team' and that this 'truly shows that al-Qaida has made gains, but on the other hand it also shows that the Bush administration has likewise profited'.[28]

This binary framing has been so central to the jihadist worldview that when bin Laden was asked by a journalist immediately in the wake of 9/11, how al-Qaeda could possibly contemplate defeating the U.S. military behemoth, his response mandated that he reconfigure the battle lines first: 'This battle is not between al-Qaeda and the U.S. This is a battle of Muslims against the global crusaders'.[29] Indeed, so potent have these imagined polarised identities become, that their propagators can go to seemingly absurd lengths to sustain them, as the Islamic State (IS) group does here, by subsuming decidedly non-Christian nations like Arab countries and Japan under the crusader rubric:

> What is Japan's concern with us? [...] It is yet another crusade just like the former crusades led by Richard the Lionheart, Barbarossa of Germany, and Louis of France. Likewise today, when Bush raised the cross, the crusader countries immediately scrambled. What is the Arab countries' concern with this crusade? [...] Because they are pleased with the rule of the cross.[30]

IS's magazine also reinforced this imagery with a photograph of murdered Japanese journalist Kenji Goto, kneeling in an orange jumpsuit beside his executioner immediately prior to his beheading in 2015. Below the image was the patently absurd title, 'The Japanese Crusader

Figure 1.1 'The Japanese Crusader Kenji Goto Jogo', *Dabiq*, Issue 7, 2015.

Kenji Goto Jogo' (see Figure 1.1). It was this same perverse logic at play that branded Muath al-Kasasbeh, a Jordanian Muslim pilot captured and burned to death in 2015 after his fighter aircraft crashed over Syria, a 'Jordanian crusader pilot'.[31]

IS and the resurrection of the 'caliphate'

Crusading rhetoric has also been yoked to the state-building project of the IS and the nascent statelets that preceded it. Abu Bakr Naji's *Management of Savagery* (*Idārat at-Tawaḥḥuš*) – perhaps the most important jihadist stratagem on creating an IS, invokes the historical examples of the crusades to reinforce its central thesis on state build-ing. Naji argues that the most important medieval Muslim victory against the Crusaders at the Battle of Hattin (1187) was not solely the result of epic decisive battles between the two forces, but rather was the culmination of a longer strategy of attrition by smaller forces.[32] The purpose of this historical analogy was to clearly identify the var-ious jihadist groups at the time of Naji's writing (c. 2004), with the small bands and factions of the medieval period who were instrumen-tal in laying the groundwork for Saladin's eventual victory over the crusaders.

For many years, al-Qaeda had invoked an aspirational future cali-phate – the religio-political entity that had historically governed the Muslim world – as their utopian end goal. On 29 June 2014, abetted by the insecurity and tumult in the wake of the Arab uprisings and the war in Iraq, a relatively new jihadist offshoot group calling itself the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (IS), hijacked this narrative by brazenly announced the re-establishment of the caliphate, turn-ing al-Qaeda's abstract utopia into a dystopic reality whilst al-Qaeda's leadership could only look on in dumbfounded impotence: 'As for you, oh soldiers of the Islamic State, then congratulations to you. Congrat-ulations on this clear victory […] Now the caliphate has returned, humbling the necks of the enemy'.[33]

IS's so-called caliphate was short-lived, having lost all territorial gains by March 2019. Nevertheless, whilst it existed, the caliphate straddled vast swathes of Iraq and Syria, governing close to the ten million people within its realm as an atavistic throwback, that posi-tively revelled in barbaric savagery and violence, all whilst shrouded in the language and regalia of historic caliphs and religious piety.

Whilst this period represented a new era for jihadism, IS were keen to stake their claim as the rightful new heirs to the jihadist mantle, and so retained a strong sense of continuity with the earliest jihadist grand narrative. Nowhere was this more apparent than in their in-vocation of a tendentious historical narrative; a curious amalgam of nostalgia for an imagined past and teleological apocalyptic imagery. A pertinent example of the nexus of IS's eschatology and historical revisionism can be seen in the choice of name for their flagship, glossy

English-language magazine, *Dabiq*, named after a small Syrian town, close to the Turkish border.

The town of Dabiq, whilst being of negligible strategic importance, was nevertheless the site of a fiercely contested battle, waged by IS fighters, who fought zealously to capture what they believed was prophesised to be the final battleground between the Muslims and Rome (Byzantium). In this case, the Romans were interpreted to be the Americans and their allies. The *Dabiq* editorial team explained the publication's name from an Islamic eschatological perspective: 'The area [Dabiq] will play a historical role in the battles leading up to the conquests of Constantinople, then Rome',[34] ultimately heralding the Day of Judgement. The rather inconvenient fact that Constantinople had been under Muslim sovereignty since the time of Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II, who had himself conquered it from IS's 'Rome' (Byzantium) in 1453, should have raised alarms over this decidedly tenuous interpretation.

Nevertheless, following the decisive victory at Dabiq in August 2014, jubilant IS supporters tweeted pictures of their flag, fluttering atop a hill overlooking Dabiq, alongside quotes from the prophecy. In the following months, as the U.S.A. began to contemplate military options against IS, supporters became positively ecstatic over the prospect of facing the neo-crusaders in a final apocalyptic battle: 'the foreign invasion of northern Syria, meaning from the plain of Dabiq. The battles (of the End Times) have grown near', and 'In Dabiq the crusade will end'.[35]

Much of IS's media output continued to reference the prophecy in subsequent months by citing the now familiar refrain, 'The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify [...] until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq' (see Figure 1.2).[36] Dabiq remained an important part of IS's perverse apocalypticism until 2016. The video beheading of American aid worker and former U.S. Army ranger, Peter Kassig, in November 2014, for example, was meticulously staged and filmed with Dabiq prominently featured as its backdrop. The killer – a sinister, balaclava-clad British fighter known as 'Jihadi John' – wielding a hunting knife by Kassig's decapitated corpse, addressed the camera in a quintessentially London accent: 'Here we are, burying the first American Crusader in Dabiq, eagerly waiting for the remainder of your armies to arrive'.[37]

Crusading imagery remained a prominent feature of the IS's propaganda efforts. Issue 4 of *Dabiq*, released in October 2014, for example, was entitled *The Failed Crusade* and contained the feature length article 'Reflections on the Final Crusade' (see Figure 1.3). In a striking
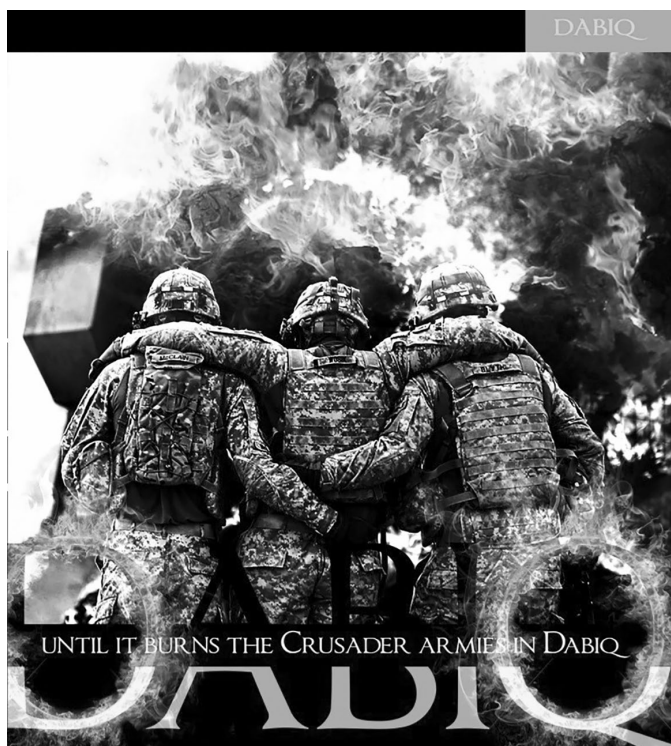
Figure 1.2 'Until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq', *Dabiq*, Issue 1, 2014.

illustration of the anachronism represented by IS's worldview, the magazine quoted its spokesman Mohammed al-Adnani's infamous threat against 'Rome's Crusaders':

> We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women, by the permission of Allah, the Exalted. If we do not reach that time, then our children and grandchildren will reach it, and they will sell your sons as slaves at the slave market.[38]

To reinforce the point, the front-cover image also featured a photoshopped IS flag fluttering atop the Holy See in the Vatican. A later issue of *Dabiq*, repeated almost verbatim, bin Laden's earlier warning: 'It is yet another crusade just like the former crusades led by Richard the Lionheart, Barbarossa of Germany, and Louis of France. Likewise today, when Bush raised the cross, the crusader countries immediately scrambled'.[39]
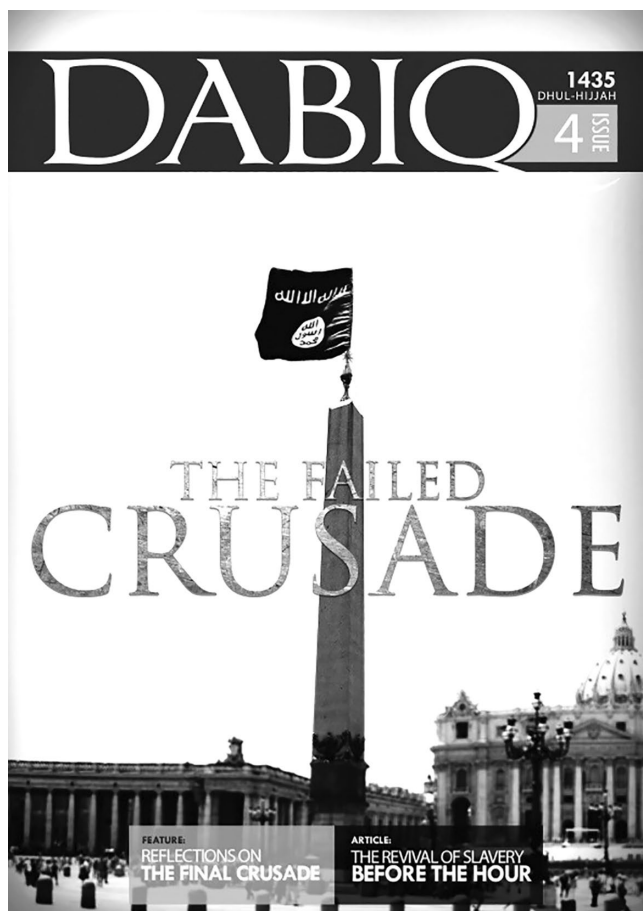
Figure 1.3 'The Failed Crusade' (Front cover) *Dabiq*, Issue 4 (2014).

IS continued to invoke the spectre of the crusades in its various propaganda efforts, even introducing the paradoxical term 'Crusader "civilian"', to sanction the murder of non-combatants in Western countries:

> Will you leave the American, the Frenchman, or any of their allies to walk safely upon the earth while the armies of the crusaders strike the lands of the Muslims not differentiating between a civilian and fighter?[40]

Having established an apparent equivalency, the article implored that 'every Muslim should get out of his house, find a crusader, and kill him'.[41] In October 2016, *Rumiyah* ratcheted up these attempts to instigate autonomous 'lone wolf' style terrorist attacks in the West as a way of compensating for military losses in their core territory: 'Let them follow the example of the lions who have preceded them by striking the Crusader citizens and interests wherever they are found in the West'.[42]

Following the deadly terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015, IS propaganda justified their attack by referring to France as 'the lead carrier of the cross in Europe', claiming their fighters had 'cast terror into the hearts of the crusaders in their very own homeland'. The statement attempted to defend their attack on the Stade de France football stadium, by arguing that it was chosen as it was hosting a match 'between the teams of Germany and France, both of which are crusader nations'. Perhaps most incongruously, the claim posited 'Paris was thereby shaken beneath the crusaders' feet, who were constricted by its streets. The result of the attacks was the deaths of no less than two hundred crusaders and the wounding of even more'.[43] Clearly, if ordinary Parisians, including a great many French Muslims amongst their ranks, could be identified as 'crusaders', then the crusader designation was proved once again to be little more than an expedient label applied to dehumanise victims and enemies alike.

This Manichean dualism that sought to divide the world in two camps – of crusaders and Muslims, also became shockingly evident in the wake of the January 2015 attacks against the offices of Charlie Hebdo. The February issue of *Dabiq* wrote of polarising the world by destroying its greatest threat, the 'grayzone': that liminal space in which young Frenchmen could be both Muslims and good citizens of the Republic, without any inherent contradiction. IS anticipated that provocative terrorist attacks, like the ones in Paris in January and November of 2015, would goad the French towards over-reaction and create a climate of fear and hostility, further alienating French Muslims from wider society and 'further bring division to the world and destroy the grayzone everywhere'. Western Muslims would then be forced to make 'one of two choices': between apostasy or IS's bastardised version of belief (see Figure 1.4). The article ended by citing, rather approvingly, George W. Bush's central dictum: 'The world today is divided into two camps. Bush spoke the truth when he said, "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists." Meaning, either you are with the crusade or you are with Islam'.[44]

The eminent success of IS's grand narrative can be traced to its ability to connect disparate historical events and experiences within its
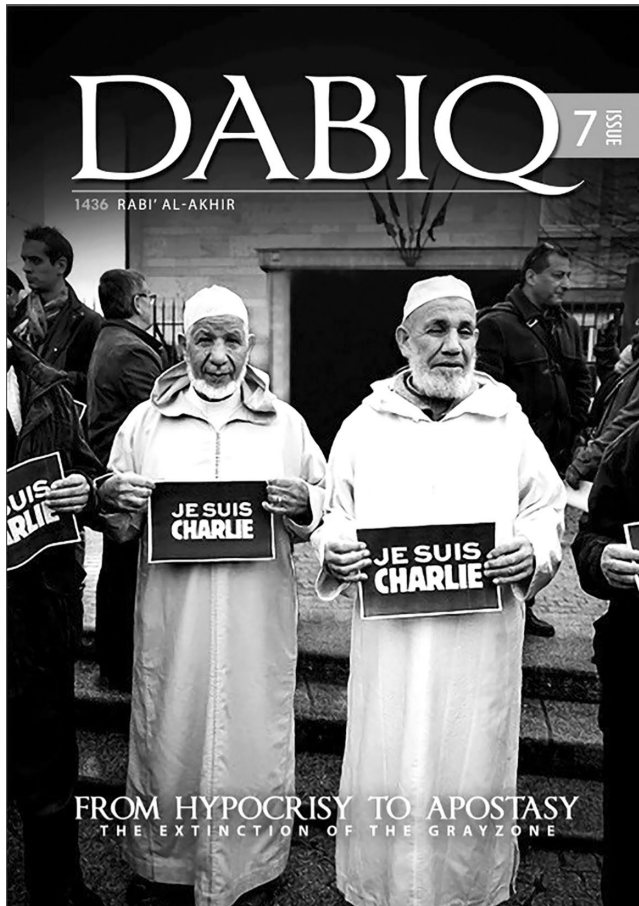
Figure 1.4 'From Hypocrisy to Apostasy: The Extinction of the Grayzone'
(Front cover), *Dabiq*, Issue 7, 2015.

broader interpretational framework, aligning that historical narrative
to geopolitical developments more broadly, and then disseminate that
worldview with an incredibly potent twenty-first-century media appa-
ratus. Following the declaration of the establishment of its caliphate
in June 2014, the self-anointed caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared:

> We have now trespassed the borders that were drawn by the mali-
> cious hands in lands of Islam in order to limit our movements and

confine us inside them. And we are working, Allah permitting, to eliminate them [borders]. This blessed advance will not stop until we hit the last nail in the coffin of the Sykes–Picot conspiracy.

Later that same month, IS released a video, *The End of Sykes-Picot*, in which bulldozers symbolically levelled part of the border between eastern Syria and northern Iraq.[45] This was also accompanied by a savvy social media campaign with the hashtag #Sykespicotover.

The border in question was a colonial remnant of the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, made between the French and British empires in the midst of First World War, as they greedily eyed their spoils of war in the shape of the crumbling Ottoman empire. An arbitrary line in the sand, based on a cartographer's typesetting on a colonial map, established the boundaries between the British and French spheres. The French would claim everything to the North of the line and the British to the South. This bizarre line in the sand would go on to become the border between Iraq, Syria and Jordan and laid the foundation for demarcating the borders of these new artificial states in subsequent treaties.[46]

In the wake of the Ottoman empire's dismantlement, the abolition of the caliphate, and the subsequent colonial domination of the Muslim world, the Sykes-Picot Agreement came to serve as useful shorthand for Western treachery and greed, and Muslim humiliation at the behest of colonial machinations. In 2014, *Dabiq* wrote:

> After demolishing the Syrian/Iraqi border set up by the crusaders to divide and disunite the Muslims, and carve up their lands in order to consolidate their control of the region, the mujahidin of the Khilafah delivered yet another blow to nationalism and the Sykes-Picot inspired borders that define it. The establishment of a new wilayah (province), Wilayat al-Furat, was announced this month by the Islamic State in an effort to eliminate any remaining traces of the kufri, nationalistic borders from the hearts of Muslims.[47]

Consequently, the claimed dissolution of Sykes-Picot took on a potent symbolic nature for the group, allowing IS to attempt to position themselves as the only viable post-colonial, post-national, even post-Arab polity: 'The banners of nationalism […] are oppose[d] to Tawhid and the Shar'iah and represent the kufri and shirki ideologies brought to the Muslim world by the two crusaders: Sykes and Picot'.[48] Moreover, they had demonstrated in some small way, IS's ability to restore

a quixotic notion of Muslim unity, despite having been fractured by a century of colonial Western intervention.

In September 2016, following their imminent rout at Dabiq at the hands of Turkish backed Syrian rebel forces, IS quietly ended publication of *Dabiq* and replaced it with a new publication titled *Rumiyah* (Rome), now referencing the Islamic prophecy over the fall of Rome instead. The cynical adaptation of the narrative showed that even worldview-confirming prophesies are not always immune to the vicissitudes of war.

Conclusion

The twenty-first century has witnessed the sharpest escalation of crusading discourses since the crusades themselves ended, becoming a leitmotif within not just the jihadist grand narrative but also the contemporary far-right's worldview.[49] The fact these narratives rest on deliberately ahistorical and highly distorted readings of events, that bear little semblance to earlier understandings and representations of the crusades in both the Muslim world and the West, has done little to curtail their potency or currency. Indeed, what we have witnessed has been nothing short of the weaponising of history, in furtherance of dangerous contemporary political projects. The construction and deployment of these tendentious historical narratives in order to support and validate the worldviews of violent extremists has engendered mutual enmity and the enactment of terrible violence in response.

We might take some small solace in the fact that these tenuous narratives are relatively easy to contest. Both the crusading rhetoric in jihadist propaganda and the very word 'crusade', for example, were largely absent from the Muslim world prior to the mid-nineteenth century. Their resurrection might more aptly be described as an artefact of the humiliation associated with the colonial era, and so are only tenuously connected to the medieval crusades themselves. We might also point to the absurd surfeit of crusader rhetoric in extremist propaganda that leaves the term itself bereft of any real meaning. Issue 10 of *Rumiyah*, for example, contained no less than 60 separate references to the crusades or crusaders. The utility of the term 'crusader' for earlier jihadists like bin Laden and his ilk lays in its ability to conjure up a monolithic, historical, Western, military enemy; the perfect foil against whom Muslim unity could be diametrically opposed. IS's ever-expanding deployment of the term 'crusader' to accommodate and subsume Arab countries, Jordanian pilots, Japanese journalists, French Muslims and citizens more generally has rendered

the term farcical, losing any supposed analytical utility it may have previously held.

Perhaps most importantly, those who benefitted the most from these contentious crusading narratives, at least in the jihadists' case, are on the wane. IS is a spent force, and its caliphate dream lies in ruins. By extension, the grand narrative on which the jihadist worldview was predicated has been dealt a devastating blow, profoundly undermining its appeal and power. It may never fully recover.

Notes

1   Mark Mazzetti and Scott Shane, 'In Yemen Bomb Plot, 2 Darkly Historical Inside Jokes', *The New York Times*, 2 November 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/03/world/03terror.html>, [accessed 20 January 2019].
2   D.S. Richards, *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin or Al-Nawadir Al-Sultaniyya Wa'l-Mahasin Al-Yusufiyya by Baha' Al-Din Ibn Shaddad: Or Al-Nawadir … Ibn Shaddad* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 37.
3   Jeffrey Lee, *God's Wolf: The Life of the Most Notorious of All Crusaders: Reynald de Chatillon* (London, 2016), p. 4.
4   Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (2010) *Inspire*, Issue 3.
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