

The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State

By William McCants

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The Islamic State is one of the most lethal and successful jihadist groups in modern history, surpassing even al-Qaeda. Thousands of its followers have marched across Syria and Iraq, subjugating millions, enslaving women, beheading captives, and daring anyone to stop them. Thousands more have spread terror beyond the Middle East under the Islamic State's black flag.

How did the Islamic State attract so many followers and conquer so much land? By being more ruthless, more apocalyptic, and more devoted to state-building than its competitors. The shrewd leaders of the Islamic State combined two of the most powerful yet contradictory ideas in Islam-the return of the Islamic Empire and the end of the world-into a mission and a message that shapes its strategy and inspires its army of zealous fighters. They have defied conventional thinking about how to wage wars and win recruits. Even if the Islamic State is defeated, jihadist terrorism will never be the same.

Based almost entirely on primary sources in Arabic-including ancient religious texts and secret al-Qaeda and Islamic State letters that few have seen - William McCants' *The ISIS Apocalypse* explores how religious fervor, strategic calculation, and doomsday prophecy shaped the Islamic State's past and foreshadow its dark future.

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The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State By William McCants Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #142641 in Books
- Published on: 2015-09-22
- Released on: 2015-09-22
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.49" h x .91" w x 6.32" l, 1.00 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 256 pages

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Review

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****One of ABC News's Books of the Year in 2015****

“Excellent” ?Aatish Taseer, *The New York Times*

"The story [of Zarqawi's rise] is well told by William McCants in his excellent new book, *The Isis Apocalypse*" ?David Ignatius, *The Atlantic*

“Every policymaker and any concerned citizen who wants to understand the rise of ISIS should read this insightful and essential book by one of our greatest scholars of Islamist movements.” ?Lawrence Wright, author, THIRTEEN DAYS IN SEPTEMBER: Carter, Begin, and Sadat at Camp David and LOOMING TOWER: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11

“It's hard to imagine anything more alien or revolting than the brutality of the Islamic State. Yet Will McCants's *ISIS Apocalypse* is lucid, thoughtful and illuminating on the group, its history, ideology and personalities. McCants understands every nuance of the religious concepts that drive the ISIS leadership, and he does a masterful job of explicating them and laying out the group's strategy. This is much the best work yet on the Islamic State.” ?Ambassador Daniel Benjamin, State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism (2009-2012)

“No one knows more about ISIS's doomsday theology than Will McCants. McCants listens to the group with uncommon care and subtlety, and policymakers need to read this book to understand ISIS's origins and plans.” ?Graeme Wood, Edward R. Murrow Fellow, The Council on Foreign Relations Contributing editor, The Atlantic Lecturer in political science, Yale University

"An excellent account of how ISIS came into being...As to the future, McCants wonders if IS’s grotesque brutality will prove its undoing. Not necessarily. Up to a point, he argues, brutality works" --*The Economist*

About the Author
William McCants directs the project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World at the Brookings Institution. He is adjunct faculty at Johns Hopkins University and a former U.S. State Department senior adviser for countering violent extremism. McCants has a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University and lives in the Washington, D.C. area.

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