



## More Heretical Musings on the Coming End-of-time Battle

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### **Executive Summary**

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- \* On 2 January 2016, they might have gotten their wish with the Saudi execution of the Shiite Sheikh Nimr Baqr al-Nimr and 46 other terrorists - 43 of them Sunni-Jihadists.
- \* In ordering the executions, Riyadh misunderstood two critical issues: the inner-Sunni dynamics introduced by al-Baghdadi and the Caliphate; and the ensuing transformation of the Sunni-Shiite schism emanating from al-Jazira (as distinct from the historic Sunni-Shiite struggles over eastern Arabia).
- \* In the current turmoil the Ummah is undergoing, Tehran and the entire Shiite world cannot let the affront that Sheikh Nimr's execution constitutes go unchallenged. Shiite anti-Sunni violence is already spreading.
- \* And so, all the doomsday predictions of mid-2015 are falling into place by early-2016. There is no turning back the clock.

### **About ISPSW**

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## Analysis

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The Muslims of the greater Middle East have been waiting in recent months for their own 28 June 1914 and the assassination in Sarajevo of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

On 2 January 2016, they might have gotten their wish with the Saudi execution of the Shiite Sheikh Nimr Baqr al-Nimr and 46 other terrorists - 43 of them Sunni-Jihadists.

In ordering the mass execution, the House of al-Saud did not seek to set the region aflame and ignite a Shiite-Sunni eruption - but they did. On the contrary, immersed as it is in the quagmire in Yemen against the Iran-sponsored Zaidi Shia Houthis - the House of al-Saud is reluctant to pick up a new fight on the other side of the peninsula. Moreover, the Gulf States that contribute the bulk of their armed forces to the Yemen adventure have repeatedly expressed strong reservations to provoking Iran and raising Sunni-Shiite tensions along the shores of the Gulf.

However, the House of al-Saud has been prompted into action by the recent inflammatory rhetoric of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's recorded message about the End-of-Time Battle launching from the Dabiq Plains (north of Aleppo, Syria, where the Islamic State's forces are now waging major battles against the Syrian military). Simply put, the Caliphate threatened to steal the thunder and leadership of Sunni Islam from the Saudis - the Custodians of the Holy Shrines. Hence, Riyadh felt compelled to outdo the Caliphate in order to assert its own Islamist-Jihadist leadership and demonstrate resolve. This is what prompted the execution of the Shiite Sheikh Nimr Baqr al-Nimr and scores of others. Thus, even though the Saudis also executed important leaders of the Sunni al-Qaida - including key ideologue Faris al-Shuwaili (aka Abu Jundul al-Azdi) and senior commanders Nimr Sahaj al-Bougmi, Ali al-Ribeh and Hamad al-Hamidi - the incident has become the new and long anticipated focus and catalyst of the Sunni-Shiite drive for an apocalyptic eruption.

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Back in the Summer of 2015, the Muslims of the greater Middle East concluded that they were already sliding toward an apocalyptic cataclysmic eruption. The dominant reason for the widespread premonitions that the fateful End-of-Time Battle is about to erupt was natural phenomena, such as blood moon, associated with the coming of Judgement Day. Elder sheikhs, fortune tellers and mystics all over the greater Middle East have since interpreted these events as the harbingers of an imminent fateful apocalyptic cataclysmic eruption.<sup>1</sup>

In more pragmatic terms, the greater Middle East has been experiencing since the Summer a kind of a perfect storm of markedly escalating overlapping clashes of unprecedented consequences and ferocity. The three mega-trends making this perfect storm - the supra-national level, the sub-national level, and the status-quo level that includes the national level - reflect just how onerous the post-Intifada upheaval of the greater Middle East has been. Although Sunnis, Shiites and Minorities dread the outcome of the perfect storm - they are all increasingly convinced that it is inevitable and imminent. The widespread belief in the coming End-of-Time Battle made the habitually traditionalist populace of the greater Middle East ready to accept, or at the least tolerate, radical outcomes that would have been unacceptable and intolerable just a couple of years beforehand. Throughout this slide, missing was the spark that would have unleashed the dark forces of war and revenge lurking beneath the surface.

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion, see the author's previous report "Heretical Musings on the Coming End-of-Time Battle" (Issue 355, June 2015).



The current cycle of Jihadist messianism started in late-December 2015 with an audio message from Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi that addressed the unfolding Jihadist campaign in the context of the quest for Judgement Day. Already starting mid-November, the Islamic State/Caliphate released a series of videos in the aftermath of the Paris attack - termed "the raid on Paris" by the Jihadists. The Caliphate assumed responsibility for the carnage in Paris and promised the spread of the Jihadist raids and strikes throughout the West - including the destruction of the White House. The message was getting more and more theologically precise from one video to another. The overall message was the promise of an endless campaign of raids delivering terrorism and carnage until the collapse of Western society and its ultimate surrender to Islam.

With tension and anticipation building within the Jihadist milieu, al-Baghdadi articulated the precise definition of the objectives of the Caliphate in an audio message posted on 26 December. He acknowledged that the Islamic State/Caliphate were facing and fighting an unprecedented global coalition that was inflicting setbacks and pain on the Jihadist forces. For Baghdadi, this is part of a Divine testing of the Jihadists' resolve and commitment to Allah. "So if we persist in the face of the world and fight all its armies with all their capabilities and then triumph, it will be of no surprise. It is Allah's promise to us."

Moreover, the magnitude and severity of the Divine testing is determined by the ultimate magnitude and significance of the Divine triumph that will surely follow, Baghdadi explained. Presently, the Jihadist camp is undergoing a profound test aimed to purify it in preparations for the ultimate test. "O Muslims, do not be amazed at the gathering of the nations and religions of disbelief against the Islamic State, for this is the condition of the victorious group in every era. This gathering will continue and the trials and tribulations will intensify until the two camps are completed, such that there does not remain in this camp hypocrisy, and there does not remain in that camp faith," Baghdadi declared. "O Muslims, indeed the battle today is no longer merely a crusader campaign. It is but the war of the nations of disbelief altogether against the Ummah of Islam, and it has not occurred before in the history of our Ummah that the entire world gathered against it in one battle as is occurring today. Indeed, it is the battle of the disbelievers altogether against the Muslims altogether, and indeed every Muslim is intended by this war."

Such a global polarization cannot but precede the End-of-Time Battle, Baghdadi declared. Therefore, the entire Muslim World must steel itself for the challenges and climax ahead. "So prepare yourselves for your war, O Muslims everywhere," Baghdadi implored. The enemies of Islam already sense the calamity that inevitably awaits them and therefore are escalating their anti-Islam campaign. But Allah already put fear in their hearts. "Here are the Christian crusaders and the nations and religions of disbelief gathered alongside them, with the Jews behind them all, not daring to come by land to fight a small group of mujahedin," Baghdadi gloated. "They know what awaits them at Dabiq and Ghouta of defeat, ruin, and devastation. They know that it will be the final war, and thereafter - by Allah's permission - we will raid them and they will not raid us, and Islam will lead the world once more until the establishment of the Hour [of Judgment Day]."

Baghdadi singled out the recent establishment by Saudi Arabia of a 34-state Muslim coalition against Jihadist terrorism as a proof of the desperation of the US and its regional proxies. He stressed that the new coalition is inherently un-Islamic and reflecting the desperation of the crusaders. Facing defeat, Baghdadi argued, "America and its allies continue to dream of eliminating the Caliphate through their proxies and tails. And every time one of their coalitions fails or one of their tails is cut off, they race to create another coalition, such that they recently announced the Saluli (Saudi) coalition - falsely called Islamic - and it was declared that its goal is to wage war against the Caliphate. If it were an Islamic coalition, it would have declared its support and aid for



the oppressed and afflicted people of Sham and its war on the Nusayriyyah [derogatory term for non-Muslim minorities such as Alawites and Druze] and their Russian masters. If it were an Islamic coalition, it would have declared enmity and war against the pagan Rafidah [derogatory term for Shiites] and the atheist Kurds in Iraq who have legitimized the killing and expelling of Sunnis and have spread corruption in their lands. If it were an Islamic coalition, atheist China would not have supported it and requested to join it. If it were an Islamic coalition, it would have declared its disavowal of its masters, the Jews and Crusaders, and would have made its goal killing the Jews and liberating Palestine.”

Because of the centrality of the Saudi-established coalition in the nefarious designs of the US-led crusaders, there is urgent imperative to liberate the Holy Shrines from the house of al-Saud and topple the Kingdom, Baghdadi explained. This way, the entire Ummah will realize that the Caliphate has been empowered to lead the Muslim World to the fateful triumph. To expedite the accomplishing of this task, Baghdadi urged the true Muslims of Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States to rise up and help the forces of the Caliphate in destroying the House of al-Saud. “O Muslims, indeed engaging oneself in this war is obligatory on every Muslim, and no one is excused concerning it. And indeed, we call on you altogether in every place to mobilize, and we specify the sons of the lands of al-Haramayn (the two sanctuaries [Holy Shrines]). So march forth, whether light or heavy, old or young. Rise, O grandsons of the Muhajirin and Ansar (companions of the Prophet Muhammad). Rise against Al Salul (the House of Saud), the apostate tawaghit (tyrannical rulers),” Baghdadi thundered.

Erdogan comprehended and sought to exploit the ascent of the Islamic State/Caliphate. Ankara needs more than ever before Riyadh’s all-Islamic authority and money and therefore cannot afford the toppling of the House of al-Saud by the Caliphate. Hence, Erdogan rushed to Riyadh in late-December in a desperate effort to consolidate all-Sunni camp - to be led by the neo-Ottoman Sultan of course. Erdogan tried even to lure Israel into the camp in the name of anti-Iran common interests. Erdogan also tried in vain to convince the Saudis and the Jordanians to bring their proxies in Syria-Iraq under the umbrella of Turkish Intelligence in order to jointly weaken the forces of the Islamic State/Caliphate and ultimately cajole them into a joint the anti-Shiite camp. Saudi King Salman refused to go along with Erdogan.

Instead, Riyadh decided to pursue its own reaction. Alas, the Saudi execution of both Sheikh Nimr and the al-Qaida luminaries - which was long-planned and quite inevitable - played into the expectations created by Baghdadi. This is an inner-Sunni Islamism-Jihadism struggle where the House of al-Saud must prove their Islamic credentials to the Islamist-Jihadist milieu and the rest of the Ummah. The House of al-Saud cannot afford to lose luster and the claim of responsibility for the Sunni Muslim drive as the Custodians of the Holy Shrines. In this context, the mass execution of “deviants” - that is both Sunni and Shiite Islamist-Purist theologians who dared to challenge the unique self-anointed role and posture of the House of al-Saud and urged their followers to rebel - was supposed to demonstrate Riyadh’s resolve to retain the role of Custodians of the Holy Shrines at all cost.

However, the cracks in Saudi society and economy are getting deeper and profound, and no amount of either executions or lavish welfare appropriations can deter the enraged and frustrated youth. Indeed, Riyadh can no longer bribe its way out of crises. On the contrary, financially strapped by the lingering impact of depressed oil prices, in late-December Riyadh cut drastically subsidies for water, electricity and gasoline. The hardest hit were the Sunni slum dwellers of central and western Saudi Arabia. Hence, the increasingly radicalized Sunni youth - particularly in Buraydah and the surrounding al-Qassim Region in north-central Saudi Arabia, and Jeddah and the entire Hijaz Tihamah region on the Red Sea shores - are interpreting the executions as yet



another manifestation of the growing weakness and uncertainty in Riyadh. Thus, Saudi Arabia is sliding into social upheaval that comes close to violent revolt. In this context, the mass executions were seemed by the House of al-Saud as drastic measures to scare the dissenters and stall the slide to revolt and violence.

Alas, Riyadh misunderstood two critical issues: the inner-Sunni dynamics introduced by the Caliphate; and the ensuing transformation of the Sunni-Shiite schism emanating from al-Jazira (as distinct from the historic Sunni-Shiite struggles over eastern Arabia).

First, in the inner-Sunni domain, the Caliphate's theological discourse about the End-of-Time Battle in our time starting Spring 2015 and subsequently about the liberation of al-Quds (Jerusalem) in order to cleanse the Holy Shrine already completed the delegitimization of the House of al-Saud and the Hashemites (the traditional Shariefs of Mecca). Even before Baghdadi claimed in late-December leadership of the coming End-of-Time Battle - all historic claimants to the leadership of Sunni Islam were no longer legitimate in the eyes of most Sunni Arabs, including the Saudis. The ongoing theological conflict with Erdogan's followers over the Caliph-vs-Sultan issue in Islam is the latest phase in Baghdadi's erudite and convincing claim for the legitimacy and viability of his attempt to restore the leadership of the Rashidun Caliphs (the first four caliphs - the Rightly Guided - who ruled from Muhammad's death in 632 AD till 661 AD and the beginning of the schism that brought the separation of the Shiites).

Second, the anti-Shiite venom of the Caliphate since the Khorasan Pledge of Spring 2014 has been playing havoc on the paranoias of the Shiite Mahdists. The ongoing cruel battles in the greater al-Jazira - the Sunni-Shiite fault line zones of Lebanon-Syria-Iraq - have long pushed the Iran-led Shiite establishment beyond the ability to tolerate any challenge from the Sunni milieu. The ongoing disagreements between Moscow and Damascus on the one hand, and Tehran-Dahiya (Beirut) on the other, over the religious-political character of the Iranian-led Shiite involvement in Syria have pushed Tehran to demonstrate its regional supremacy at all cost. Given the mounting problems in al-Jazira - Tehran is increasingly focused on the Arabian Peninsula as demonstrated in the Iranian vitriolic anti-Saudi campaign after the September 2015 stampede during the Hajj (in which, Tehran insists but Riyadh denies, over a thousand Iranians were killed). Tehran is convinced it can get away with virtually anything while Obama is still in office and thus must consolidate tangible gains in the coming year. Hence, the Mahdists in Tehran, including Supreme Leader Khamenei, argue that the Shiites must dominate and win the approaching End-of-Time Battle so as to reclaim Islam's three Holy Shrines (Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem). These developments should have alarmed Riyadh and contained the zeal to provoke Tehran - but they did not.

Hence, for the Mahdists of Tehran, the execution of Sheikh Nimr Baqr al-Nimr is far from just an execution of a venerable Shiite cleric. The execution is Riyadh's symbolic attempt to suppress by the sword the Shiite Mahdist challenge to the Sunni Custodians of the Holy Shrines. Riyadh, Tehran is convinced, is cognizant the Sunnis can no longer prevent the arrival of the End-of-Time Battle and the ensuing Shiite-Mahdist triumph that will remove the Holy Shrines from Sunni hands and give them back to their legitimate custodians - Caliph Ali's successors, that is, the Tehran-led Shiites.

Iranian and Shiite Arab leaders reacted with fury to the news of Nimr's execution. Following guidance from Tehran, they all stressed that the execution is the harbinger for the end of both Saudi Arabia and the House of al-Saud. In Tehran, Foreign Ministry spokesman Hossein Jaber Ansari set the tone the moment the executions were announced. "The Saudi government supports terrorist movements and extremists, but confronts domestic critics with oppression and execution ... the Saudi government will pay a high price for following



these policies.” The HizbAllah insisted the execution was the manifestation of US-led regional policies. “We hold the US and its allies ... responsible for covering up the kingdom’s crimes against it[s] people and those of the region,” read the HizbAllah’s first statement.

Several senior clerics and politicians built Tehran’s case against Riyadh.

The highly authoritative Ayatollah Sayyed Ahmad Khatami, member of the Assembly of Experts and Friday Prayer Imam, urged all Muslims to “rise against the Saudi regime” because of the execution of Sheikh Nimr. “The execution of Sheikh Nimr, as another part of the chain of crimes committed by the all-Saud regime, will remain as an eternal shame for the regime,” Khatami declared. “I have no doubt that this pure blood will stain the collar of the House of Saud and wipe them from the pages of history,” Khatami predicted. All Saudi rulers “will one day face the consequences of their crimes” and consequently “the blood of innocent people will ultimately bring an end to the al-Saud regime,” he reiterated. “It is expected of the Muslim World to voice their protest at the criminal government [of Saudi Arabia] through their Islamic outcry, and pay homage to this brave and devoted Sheikh,” Khatami concluded. “The Islamic World is expected to cry out and denounce this infamous regime as much as it can.”

Alaeddin Boroujerdi, the powerful chairman of the Majlis’s National Security and Foreign Policy Commission concurred. “Undoubtedly, Sheikh Nimr’s execution is a crime whose extensive consequences will come after Saudi Arabia,” he said. “Saudi Arabia’s unwise measure indicated the country’s passiveness and failure in different regional issues from Iraq and Syria to Yemen”.

Khalaf Abdelsamad, the head of the parliamentary bloc of Iraq’s Shiite Dawa party, echoed Tehran’s line. “The execution of Sheikh al-Nimr will have serious consequences and bring about the end of the al-Saud rule,” he said.

Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei initially remained quiet. His office tweeted that “Awakening is not suppressible” and therefore Saudi Arabia would not be able to contain the righteous rage engendered by Nimr’s execution.

Khamenei waited a whole day - till 3 January - to deliver a harsh address to leading clerics. He predicted that Saudi Arabia would soon face “divine revenge” for executing Sheikh Nimr. “Without a doubt, the unlawfully shed blood of this innocent martyr will have a rapid effect and the divine vengeance will befall Saudi politicians,” Khamenei stated. “God will not forgive.” He added that the execution was “a political mistake by the Saudi government” that would “haunt its politicians.” Khamenei emphasized that “the Almighty God will not remain indifferent to innocent blood and [this] unrightfully shed blood will rapidly afflict the politicians and executives of this [Saudi] regime.”

Just how important the avenging of Sheikh Nimr’s blood is for the highest echelons of Tehran could be best learned from the reaction of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary General of the HizbAllah. In the previous ten days, he delivered two major speeches regarding the revenge for the Israeli target-killing of Samir Quntar as the primary objective of the HizbAllah. Now, on 3 January, Nasrallah delivered an unscheduled speech focusing on avenging Sheikh Nimr as the Hizballah’s main task.

Nasrallah criticized the Saudi human rights record. “He, who speaks out is executed. This is Saudi Arabia, which wants to spread democracy in the region.” In this environment, Sheikh Nimr “was very courageous regarding what he said... He was a reformist man” championing the rights of people in the Arabian Peninsula. “He spoke what is right.” Nasrallah stressed the execution’s message to the Shiite world. “This execution was very



shocking," he admitted. Riyadh sought to send the entire Ummah "a message in blood with the swords, with beheadings" that anybody who "criticizes [the] al-Saud, his blood will be spilled." This is part and parcel of Riyadh's promotion of divisions and differences between Sunnis and Shiites. Wherever such a conflict exists, "look for Saudi Arabia." Nasrallah argued that the execution of Sheikh Nimr provides a unique opportunity for addressing these core issues regarding Saudi Arabia. "Has not the time come to say with courage to the whole world that the main source of, and the launching pad for, Takfiri ideology ... is from this regime, from this family," Nasrallah said. "They are partners in all the blood which is spilled in the Arab and Islamic countries." There is no alternative to toppling the House of al-Saud. "Any hope for Saudi rational behavior has ended," Nasrallah concluded. "When a regime loses its mind that means it has reached the abyss."

Thus, in the current turmoil the Ummah is undergoing, Tehran and the entire Shiite world cannot let the affront that Sheikh Nimr's execution constitutes go unchallenged. Hence the authoritative statements about Divine revenge and retribution. However, the Mahdists of Tehran are not going to wait for Allah to strike out. They are going to accelerate the process by confronting Saudi Arabia wherever they can. Meanwhile, the Islamic State perceives the Shiite-Saudi confrontation a Divine mutual weakening of both sinning camps that exacerbates the region and expedites the progress of the Righteous Sunnis - the Caliphate - to establishing the righteous Muslim rule over Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem.

Indeed, Shiite anti-Sunni violence is slowly spreading. In Iraq, Sunni mosques were torched and Imams were assassinated. In Qatif, Saudi Arabia's Shiite heartlands, anti-regime riots broke out in several villages. In the village of Awamiya, Sheikh Nimr's birthplace, gunmen opened "heavy fire" on police - killing two. Shiite rioters also opened fire on police in volatile Bahrain. The Saudi Embassy in Tehran and the Consulate in Mashhad were torched by enraged mobs as police stood by. The flames will continue to spread.

On 5 January, there emerged the first indicators of an organized insurrection and subversion campaign against Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. Both Iranian and HizbAllah media channels carried the communique announcing the establishment of the "Fadaeeyoun al-Nimr" - a Jihadist group based throughout eastern Saudi Arabia and dedicated to avenging Sheikh Nimr's blood. The "Fadaeeyoun al-Nimr" has several hundred trained operatives and a few thousand volunteers mainly in the Qatif area. The declared objective of the "Fadaeeyoun al-Nimr" goes well beyond revenge as the leaders vowed they will soon "set fire to al-Saud and the entire Saudi Arabia". Iranian TV showed massive demonstrations in Qatif with the mob vowing revenge and chanting "death to al-Saud" slogans.

Meanwhile, in Baghdad, the Iraqi Harakat al-Nujaba (the Nujaba Movement) announced the establishment of a dedicated branch committed to the liberation of the Shiites of the Arabian Peninsula and the toppling of the House of al-Saud. The execution of Sheikh Nimr proved there can be no coexistence with Riyadh and that an armed struggle is the only way. "Saudi Arabia should wait for response on its soil," the Harakat al-Nujaba declared. The Iraqi Harakat al-Nujaba is a very large, well trained and well equipped militia that is effectively an arm of Iran's Qods Force. The Nujaba forces are organized in elite special forces units and militarized battalions with tanks, artillery and armored vehicles. Close to ten thousand Nujaba fighters are fighting in Iraq (the Ramadi area) and over four thousand fighters are fighting in Syria (the Aleppo area). Hence, the announcement of the Harakat al-Nujaba that it is joining the armed struggle to avenge Sheikh Nimr's blood means the commitment-by-proxy of elite assets of Iran's Qods Force to the Shiite insurrection inside Saudi Arabia.

And so, all the doomsday predictions of mid-2015 are falling into place by early-2016. There is no turning back the clock.



**Remarks:** Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

### About the Author of this Issue

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