

Top 10 Bogus ISIS Stories

By [Adam Johnson](#)

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

ISIS's violent bona fides are not in doubt to anyone paying attention. They've [targeted religious minorities](#), [beheaded aid workers](#), sold women [into sex slavery](#) and have been all-around devastating for those under their rule. But as America debates the [possibility of a full-scale ground invasion](#) of ISIS-controlled territory, it's important to note that much of the ISIS threat — namely that which targets the West — has been habitually overstated by an uncritical media.

In no particular order, here are the ten most bogus ISIS scare stories over the past year:

1. Female genital mutilation edict - July 2014

WORLD IRAQ

UN: ISIS Orders Women and Girls in Mosul to Undergo Genital Mutilation

Noah Rayman
@noahrayman
July 24, 2014



Who it fooled: Most major media outlets from [Time](#) to [Reuters](#) to [The Atlantic](#) to [the BBC](#) (whose story has since been [scrubbed](#) online). Above all, the UN itself.

Why it's bogus: Actual residents of Mosul and regional experts quickly knew it reeked. The story was subsequently discredited by [experts](#) and [journalists](#) and [called a hoax](#) soon after.

2. Church-burning in Mosul - July 2014

العربية NEWS BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE MEDIA OPINION LIFESTYLE VARIETY

ISIS burns 1,800-year-old church in Mosul



The burning of the church is the latest in a series of destruction of Christian property in Mosul, which was taken by the Islamist rebels last month.

1,660 EWS
79 COMMENTS
SHARE ARE
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Who it fooled: [Human Rights Watch](#), [The Atlantic](#), [The Independent](#), [The Times of India](#)

Why it's bogus: An [intrepid archaeologist](#), Sam Hardy, called BS and thanks to the magic of reverse image **Google** search and some prodding by [yours truly](#), it was eventually retracted by several outlets and never mentioned again.

3. ISIS in Mexico - October 2014

Report: 4 ISIS Terrorists Caught at Southern Border in 36 Hrs



f share this

✉ email



Who it fooled: [Fox News](#), [Judicial Watch](#), [The Inquisitr](#) .

Why it's bogus: Absurd on its face, the story was quickly and [roundly debunked](#).

4. ISIS recruiting emo British teen - December 2014

Is this boy the latest Briton to join ISIS?



Nicholas Reilly for Metro.co.uk Friday 26 Dec 2014 7:01 pm



4k



Who it fooled: [Metro](#), [The Daily Mail](#), [The Telegraph](#)

Why it's bogus: The person who uploaded the picture admitted on Twitter it was a fake. The media subsequently deemed it a ["hoax"](#).

5. ISIS Caliphate map - July 2014

See the Terrifying ISIS Map Showing Its 5-Year Expansion Plan

Jul 3, 2014, 10:50 AM ET
By COLLEEN CURRY

Like 2.5k share Tweet 643 +1 128 723 Comments



Who it fooled: [ABC News](#), [International Business Times](#), [Breitbart](#)

Why it's bogus: The original story from **ABC News** cited a map that had been floating around the Internet for months. To this day, its one and only source is [a tweet](#) from a noted white supremacist website [Third Position](#).

[io9.com](#) and [others](#) eventually deemed it a [hoax](#).

6. ISIS beheads Christian children - Aug 2014



Who it fooled: Originally asserted on [CNN](#) by self-proclaimed Iraqi-Christian activist Mark Arabo—a grocery store [industry lobbyist](#) whose previous media appearance was on [a local](#)

[San Diego news channel](#) to [oppose an increase](#) in minimum wage—this story spread among [right-wing](#) and [Christian media](#).

Why it's bogus: After a fairly [thorough inquiry](#), **snopes** eventually determined the claim was “inconclusive,” having found no independent evidence it occurred.

7. \$425m bank robbery - June 2014

The screenshot shows the top portion of a news article on The Washington Post website. At the top left is the site's logo and a search bar. Below the logo is the 'Morning Mix' section header. The main headline reads: "ISIS just stole \$425 million, Iraqi governor says, and became the 'world's richest terrorist group'". Below the headline are social media sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Email, and a plus sign. To the right of these icons is a Capital One Bank advertisement. Further right are icons for font size, print, and share. Below the headline, the author is identified as Terrence McCoy, dated June 12, 2014, with a 'Follow @terrence_mccoy' button. On the right side, there is a 'Get Morning Mix' subscription box with the text 'Daily updates delivered just for you.' and a blue button.

Who it fooled: [The Washington Post](#), [International Business Times](#), [Fox News](#), [Mic](#), [Vocativ](#)

Why it's bogus: The story was based solely on accounts from the former mayor of Mosul and was later found to be incredible by [The Financial Times](#) and, ultimately, [US officials](#) themselves.

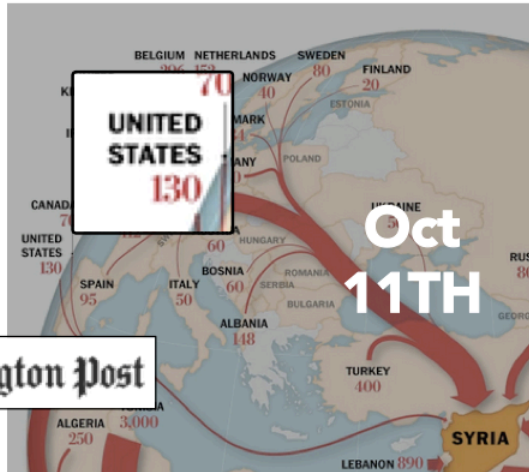
8. 'Over 100 Americans have joined ISIS' - October 2014

The CIA estimates there are about 15,000 militants from 80 countries in Iraq and Syria. Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and Jordan have each seen more than 2,000 people leave for the battlefield. More than 100 fighters have arrived from the U.S.

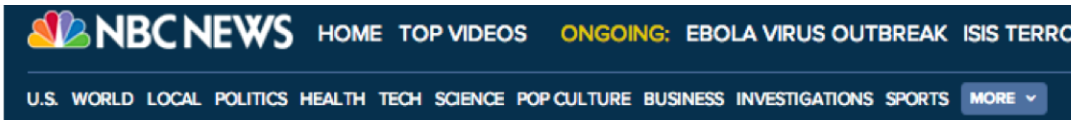


countries," Blake said, adding that roughly 2,000 of those fighters hail from Western countries – including "at least 500 from the U.K, 700 from France, 400 from Germany, and more than 100 Americans [who] have traveled, or tried to travel into Syria."

Abusalha is counted among the 100 or so Americans who have traveled to Syria or attempted to do so, a figure cited repeatedly by senior U.S. officials in ways that suggest there is precision in their understanding of who and where those people are.



Who it fooled: [NBC News](#), [Washington Post](#), [Al Jazeera](#)



Around 12 Americans Are Fighting in Syria, Not 100: FBI Director



Sept 26 2014

Why it's bogus: After the [FBI admitted](#) there were only "about a dozen" Americans fighting alongside jihadists in Syria in September 2014, several media outlets [continued to report](#) "over 100," despite the government correcting the record [several weeks prior](#).

9. #AllEyesOnISIS “Twitter storm” - June 2014



World > Middle East > Iraq

ISIS, opponents wage hashtag war on Twitter

BY LINDSAY WISE



McClatchy Washington Bureau June 20, 2014

Who it fooled: [The Daily Mail](#), [McClatchy](#)

Why it's bogus: Yours truly showed that the “Twitter storm” was simply [a reposting of weeks- or months-old tweets](#) by an overzealous ISIS fanboi.

10. ISIS's ebola terror plot - December 2014



Who it fooled: [The Daily Mail](#), [Fox News](#), [Mashable](#), [random right-wing media](#)

Why it's bogus: "Iraqi media" was the only source for the story, and the Iraqi minister of Health quickly [debunked it](#).

Adam Johnson is a freelance journalist; formerly he was a founder of the hardware startup Brightbox. You can follow him on **Twitter** at [@adamjohnsonnyc](#). A version of this post appeared on his blog **Citations Needed** ([2/20/15](#)).

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