



ISIS's Response to the Fall of Their Last Stronghold in al-Baghuz

March 21, 2019

Overview

On the eve of the fall of al-Baghuz Fawqani, the last stronghold of ISIS in the lower Euphrates Valley, ISIS began a media campaign. Its objectives are to encourage the organization's fighters and supporters, and to send the message that **ISIS has lost the battle but not the war.**¹ A key person in the campaign is ISIS spokesman **Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajer**. He issued a recording calling on organization operatives in all ISIS's provinces **to continue the path of jihad and expand their activities against the "infidel nations," particularly the United States, "the enemy of Islam and the Muslims."**

► **Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajer** is a key ISIS media figure, who inherited the role of Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the former spokesman. On March 18, 2019, ISIS's al-Furqan Media Foundation issued a 45-minute recording made by Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajer. Its title was "Being an honest [jihad fighter] before Allah, Allah kept his promise to him [of eternal life in paradise]." It is based on a *hadith* (the Muslim oral tradition) dealing with a dedicated jihad fighter at the dawn of Islam who was killed during jihad and became a shaheed, gaining eternal life in paradise. **The title hints at the main message of the recording, which is a call to the organization's fighters in all the ISIS provinces to adhere to the path of jihad and expand their activities.**

¹ For further information, see the March 11, 2019 bulletin, "ISIS's media response to the imminent defeat in the village of Al-Baghuz."



The picture accompanying the recording. The Arabic reads, "Being an honest [jihad fighter] before Allah, Allah kept his promise to him [of eternal life in paradise]" (Shabakat Shumukh, March 18, 2019).

The main theme of Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajer

► The following was the main theme of Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajer's recording:

- ◆ **The importance of fulfilling the duty of jihad and being patient on the road to victory:** Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajer began by stressing the importance of jihad in Islam and **the duty to wage jihad, which he considered the personal duty of every Muslim.** He also stressed the importance of patience in achieving victory, saying Allah said that if believers have patience, despite the hardships, victory will be certain. He added that even if "the infidel nations" unite against the jihad fighters, nothing will harm them (the fighters) and they will continue to adhere to their faith until the promised victory.
- ◆ **Jihad fighters will be rewarded with paradise:** Al-Muhajer stressed that jihad fighters are promised the reward of paradise. He spoke of the tradition from the dawn of Islam about a jihad fighter who was killed and became a shaheed, emphasizing that the fighters of ISIS's Islamic State will have the same reward. Reaching paradise is, he said, "the great victory" and not a victory of this world. However, he said, the fate of all those who work against ISIS will be torture and agony in hell.
- ◆ **Jihad fighters defend Muslims and are a source of pride:** Al-Muhajer related to the jihad operatives who fought in **Mosul** (which was ISIS's "capital city" in Iraq), **al-Raqqa** (which was ISIS's "capital city" in Syria) and **Sirte** (which was ISIS's "capital city" in Libya). The operatives in those and other ISIS provinces are a source of pride for Islam, because they the fought so the word of Allah would be the one that mattered in this world, and the word of the "infidels" would be worthless.



Sending the message that ISIS defends Muslims: an operative from the ISIS pocket in al-Baghuz Fawqani on the eve of its fall speaks against the "Crusaders" (Christians and the international coalition) and claims ISIS is a shield for Muslims.

◆ **Encouragement to continue the battle against the "infidels," especially the United States:**

- According to Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajer, ISIS operatives in the various provinces suffer hardships but they are the spearhead of Islam in the battle against the "infidel nations." The United States stands at the head of the "infidel nations" and is "the enemy of Islam and Muslims, killing Muslims in cold blood." He accused the United States of giving Iraq to the Shi'ites and Syria to the infidels, "the Alawite regime." He added that the American declaration of having defeated ISIS is similar to the declarations made by other infidel leaders in the past, who were eventually defeated. Al-Muhajer stated that even senior officials in the American administration claim ISIS has not been defeated, and understand that the Islamic State exists and cannot be ignored.
- Al-Muhajer added that many Islamic State fighters are active in Iraq and Syria, in Khorasan, West Africa and other provinces, and that **12,000 ISIS fighters will not easily be defeated**. He said the United States is mistaken in thinking that by killing Sunnis it will succeed in imposing its policies on the region. He said the brutal American fighting against ISIS fighters and their families in al-Baghuz Fawqani will not bring about the destruction of the Islamic State. **He threatened the United States, saying that "you will not have security, rather, your bodies will be dismembered [a hint at the fighting against the United States and launching terrorist attacks against it]. He then called on the United States to leave the region, saying that "the support of the dictators in the Arabian Peninsula will not help you."**

◆ **A call for attacks to avenge the mass-killing attacks in the two mosques in New Zealand:** Al-Muhajer claimed Western leaders were crying crocodile tears over the killing of the Muslim worshippers in New Zealand, and **called on ISIS operatives to avenge their deaths**. He said that because of their hostility to Muslims, the leaders of the West do not recoil from attacking mosques in Syria and Iraq, and do not consider them holy places. He criticized the dictators in the Muslim world for not condemning the slaughter carried out by their masters [i.e., the leaders of the West]. He said the attack in New Zealand was another on the list of the series of catastrophes the "infidels" visited upon Muslims, which would continue in the future.

◆ **An appeal to Sunnis in Iraq to join ISIS:** Al-Muhajer called on the Sunni tribes in Iraq not to cooperate with the Shi'ite regime, which oppresses Sunnis, and to fight alongside ISIS. He also called on them to join ISIS because, he said, ISIS would rescue them from Iran. He added that **the Islamic State was expanding its activities in Iraq**, and it would be worth their while to repent and join the ranks of ISIS, saying that **even Baghdad is not safe from ISIS**.

◆ **A warning to Sunnis and Sunni tribes in Syria, especially those living in the Euphrates Valley and to the east of it:** Al-Muhajer warned them not to join the Kurdish forces fighting ISIS, and called on them to repent and join the organization instead, otherwise they would be severely hurt. **He called on ISIS operatives in al-Hasakeh and al-Raqqa [which are controlled by the Kurds] to avenge the blood of their brothers**. He called on ISIS operatives in Syria **to use IEDs, snipers and car bombs to attack [the Kurds and Americans]**.

◆ **A call to jihad fighters in the various provinces to expand the campaign:** Al-Muhajer appealed to ISIS fighters in **Iraq, Syria, Khorasan, East Asia, West Africa, Libya, China, Somalia and the other provinces to expand the campaign and ignore claims that the organization had been weakened**. He said the strength of the jihad fighters was in their faith, and called on them not to be deterred by difficulties, because the war was not over yet.

◆ **A message from ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi:** Al-Muhajer said ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi recommended that jihad fighters **adhere to their faith in Allah**, and take care in using communications because of the risks involved [apparently a reference to the use of cell phones and the Internet]. He added that al-Baghdadi called

on them **to remain vigilant and obey their commanders**. He also issued a call to ISIS members who were imprisoned, urging them to be patient and pray for the victory of the Islamic State.