



New video of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi for the first time since 2014

May 1, 2019

Overview

On April 29, 2019, ISIS released a video showing the organization's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. **The video is up-to-date** and mentions events that took place recently (such as the terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka, the terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia, and the elections in Israel). **This is the first video that Al-Baghdadi has appeared in since June 2014**, when he announced at a mosque in Mosul the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate State. While at the time of his last appearance ISIS was at the height of its power, the current video was produced at a time when the Caliphate has collapsed and after the recent blow to ISIS in Syria¹.

In the ITIC's assessment, the video was produced mainly to refute the rumors that Al-Baghdadi had been killed; to encourage the organization's operatives to continue to follow the path of jihad to avenge the blood of the ISIS operatives killed in Al-Baghouz; to convey the message that ISIS is still alive and kicking; to emphasize that its provinces continue their activity around the globe despite the blows in Syria and Iraq; and to enlist the support of its supporters and the entire Islamic nation. Al-Baghdadi's appearance is **part of a media campaign that ISIS began after the fall of Al-Baghouz, accompanied by a major wave of attacks abroad, culminating (so far) in the terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka.**

► The 18-minute video was produced by the Al-Furqan Media Foundation and distributed by ISIS's media outlets (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, April 29, 2019). Al-Furqan is ISIS's main content production foundation, which is responsible for producing videos and audiotapes of senior members of the organization. It is evident that due to its length, the video was not recorded continuously but was edited in several parts. Breaks may have been necessary in order to allow Al-Baghdadi to rest and organize his thoughts, according to the various topics that he chose to focus on.

¹ Between these two videos, Al-Baghdadi appeared in several audiotapes disseminated on social media and on websites affiliated with ISIS: the first was on May 13, 2015; the second on December 25, 2015; the third on November 3, 2016; the fourth on September 23, 2017 and the fifth on August 22, 2018.



The title of the video distributed by ISIS: “In the hospitality of the Emir of the Believers, Caliph [of the Islamic nation] Ibrahim Bin Awwad al-Badri al-Husseini al-Qurashi al-Baghdadi, may Allah protect him and grant him His protection.” The month of Sha’aban 1440 Hijri appears at the bottom. This is the current Islamic month, which began on April 7, 2019 (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, April 29, 2019)

Insights regarding Al-Baghdadi’s appearance in the video

► In contrast to the previous video, in which Al-Baghdadi is well-dressed, relatively well-groomed, with a neat beard, calm and smug, **in the present video, Al-Baghdadi looks somewhat tired and exhausted**, sitting on the ground with his legs crossed, wearing a military vest. He looks unkempt: his beard is messy, part of it is greying and part of it is dyed in a way that looks faded, and he is sloppily dressed in clothing more characteristic of ISIS’s operatives than its leader. Next to him there is a rifle which, in the ITIC’s opinion, is intended to demonstrate that he is a jihad fighter (or for self-defense purposes). Al-Baghdadi speaks relatively slowly in a less enthusiastic and energetic tone than in the past. His appearance is understandable in light of the difficulties ISIS is facing in its “core countries” (Syria and Iraq), which affect Al-Baghdadi’s personal conduct (he is apparently forced to flee and to relocate from time to time).

► However, **Al-Baghdadi appears to be safe and sound and the reports of his death were incorrect.** It is possible that his neglected appearance is also intended to underline his connection to ISIS’s operatives on the ground and to show himself as the leader of a guerrilla organization in the era following the collapse of the Islamic Caliphate. In the video, he is shown speaking with three ISIS operatives, two of them masked and blurred. They are apparently senior members of the organization.



Al-Baghdadi in the video: he looks somewhat exhausted and speaks in a quieter and less enthusiastic tone than before in view of the circumstances (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, April 29, 2019)



The operatives who were shown speaking with Al-Baghdadi in the video (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, April 29, 2019)

The key topics mentioned by Al-Baghdadi

► Following are the key topics that were mentioned by Al-Baghdadi:

◆ **The campaign in Al-Baghrouz:**

- At the beginning of his speech, Al-Baghdadi notes that “the campaign of Islam with the Crusaders [i.e., the US and the West] **is long.**” He says that the campaign over Al-Baghrouz was marked by great brutality against ISIS operatives on the part of the countries of the US-led International Coalition. On the other hand, ISIS’s operatives and commanders displayed heroism and steadfastness, fighting until the last minute. Al-Baghdadi prays to Allah to accept those who were killed in Al-Baghrouz as shahids and bring about the release of the operatives who were captured.

- Al-Baghdadi praises the prominent ISIS commanders in Al-Baghouz and names them in order to turn them into a symbol of sacrifice for Islam. The commanders mentioned by Al-Baghdadi came from various countries (including two Western countries), with their common denominator being ISIS’s jihadi ideology. Listing their names indicates that Al-Baghdadi was kept informed of the fighting in Al-Baghouz and was acquainted with the local field commanders.
- The first of the dead ISIS commanders mentioned by Al-Baghdadi is **Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Tamimi**, from the Arabian Peninsula (who apparently served as the commander of Al-Baghouz on behalf of ISIS). Next he mentions **Abu Hajer Abd al-Samad al-Iraqi al-Talebi**, who sacrificed his life and his property; **Abu al-Walid al-Sinawi (from Sinai)**; **Abd al-Ghareb al-Iraqi and Abu Mus’ab al-Hijazi (from Saudi Arabia)**. He also mentions **Abu Yasser the Belgian** and **Abu Tareq the Iraqi**, describing them as having borne the heaviest burden of the campaign.
- Al-Baghdadi also praises the organization’s media operatives: **Abu Abdullah the Australian**; **Khaled al-Qahtani** from the Arabian Peninsula; **Abu Jihad the Chechen**; and **Abu Anas Fabien the Frenchman and his brother Othman**, who were killed in Al-Baghouz². This is an indication of **the great importance that Al-Baghdadi attaches to ISIS’s media and the operatives who head it.**
- ◆ **A call to avenge the blood of those killed in Al-Baghouz:** Al-Baghdadi calls on ISIS’s operatives and supporters to avenge the blood of those killed in Al-Baghouz **so that there would be continuity to the campaign. According to him, the jihad waged by ISIS will continue until the resurrection of the dead.** He adds, “We ask Allah to grant us and our brothers the capabilities of steadfastness, the ability to strike, success, guidance, and wisdom ...”

²According to a statement issued by the International Coalition countries, **Fabien Clain** was killed in an airstrike against a building in the village of Al-Baghouz (on the night of February 20-21, 2019). Clain was a senior ISIS operative from Toulouse, France, who converted to Islam in the 1990s and became a radical jihadist. Another man who was in the building with him was seriously wounded. Fabien Clain, codenamed Abu Anas the Frenchman, was involved in the combined terrorist attack carried out by ISIS at six different sites in Paris on December 13, 2015. At least 132 people were killed and 352 were wounded. He was also the one who claimed responsibility for the attack on behalf of ISIS (France 24, February 28, 2019; Akhbar Al-Aan, March 1, 2019; The Washington Post, March 5, 2019).

◆ He goes on to specify **the recent attacks carried out by ISIS operatives abroad**, mentions the names of some of the provinces and networks, and lists some of the operations that they carried out:

- **The attacks in Sri Lanka:** Towards the end of the video, Al-Baghdadi's voice is heard against the backdrop of a photo of the terrorists who carried out the attacks in Sri Lanka, accompanied by photos from the international media that covered the attacks. Al-Baghdadi praises the attacks, noting that they “warmed the hearts of the people of Tawhid [i.e., the oneness of Allah],” **since those who carried out the attacks “struck the Crusaders on their Easter holiday, in retaliation for their brothers in Al-Baghrouz.”** He adds that **“this is only part of the vengeance that awaits the Crusaders and their followers [in the original: tails], with the help of Allah, may He be praised. Praise Allah that the dead included Americans and Europeans.”** He praises the pledge of allegiance of the jihadi operatives in Sri Lanka and their joining ISIS. He calls on them to demonstrate unity and to be “a thorn in the breast [i.e., in the hearts] of the Crusaders.” He asks Allah to accept those who carried out the attacks as shahids in Paradise **and to ensure that the additional operatives (implicitly: in Sri Lanka) complete the path that they began.**



Al-Baghdadi speaks about the series of terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka with photos of the terrorists who carried out the suicide bombing attacks in the background (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, April 29, 2019)

- **The wave of vengeance attacks by ISIS around the world** (carried out on April 8-11, 2019 and entitled “The Campaign of Vengeance for the blessed Al-Sham Province”): according to Al-Baghdadi, the wave of attacks took place in

eight countries and included 92 attacks³. He praises the activity carried out by ISIS's operatives in the various provinces, noting that this is evidence of the unity of ranks among the jihad fighters of ISIS to protect the Muslims.

- **Libya:** Al-Baghdadi praises the steadfastness of the ISIS operatives in Libya and their takeover of the village of Al-Fuqaha for several hours last month⁴. According to him, they proved to their enemies that they can take the initiative and that they know that the battle against their enemies is a war of attrition.

- **Burkina Faso and Mali:** Al-Baghdadi praises the pledge of allegiance made to him by the “brothers,” i.e., the local jihadi operatives **in Burkina Faso and Mali**. He asks Allah to protect them and **Abu al-Walid al-Sahrawi**.⁵ He calls on these operatives to **“intensify their blows” against France and its allies in order to avenge the operatives in Iraq and Syria**, stressing the mutual responsibility among Muslims.

- **The pledge of allegiance of operatives in Khorasan:** Al-Baghdadi notes that several groups in Khorasan (the Khorasan Province, which includes Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of Iran) joined ISIS and pledged allegiance to the Caliph. He adds that he prays to Allah to help them be steadfast and succeed along their path.

- **The attack in Al-Zulfi, Saudi Arabia:** Al-Baghdadi praises the attack (which was actually unsuccessful) in Al-Zulfi in Saudi Arabia (see Spotlight on Global Jihad, May 1, 2019). He expresses the hope that such attacks will continue. He calls on the brothers of those who carried out the attack in Al-Zulfi to avenge

³See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from April 14, 2019: “Wave of orchestrated ISIS terrorist retaliation attacks around the globe: overview and assessment”

⁴ For more information, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin Spotlight on Global Jihad from April 10, 2019.

⁵**Adnan Abu al-Walid Al-Sahrawi:** His real name is **Lahbib Abdi Sa'id**. He is also known as **Al-Idrisi Lahbib al-Sahrawi**. He was born in the city of Al-Ayoun, on the southwestern tip of Morocco and near northern Western Sahara. He is considered one of the most wanted terrorist operatives by security officials in North Africa. He served as one of the commanders of the Polisario Front, which is fighting for the independence of the Moroccan desert from the regime of King Mohammed VI. In October 2011, he became known for the first time, after the “Movement of Tawhid and Jihad in West Africa” abducted three European nationals in southwestern Algiers. In May 2012, Al-Sahrawi announced that his movement's worldview was no different from that of Al-Qaeda and that it was following the path of Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. In May 2015, Al-Sahrawi **pledged allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi** (24, UAE news website, February 6, 2018). The mention of Al-Sahrawi by Al-Baghdadi may indicate that Al-Sahrawi is involved in ISIS's fighting in Africa.

their brothers in the Arabian Peninsula **and to accelerate the path of jihad against the Saudi regime**. Next there is a segment showing Al-Baghdadi below the inscription: “The Emir of the Faithful, may Allah protect him, calls on [ISIS’s operatives] to redouble and increase their strikes against the Crusaders, those who deviate from the religion of Islam [i.e., the secular Arab and Muslim regimes], and those who help them.”



Al-Baghdadi calling on ISIS operatives to increase their attacks against Western countries and against the regimes that help them (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, April 29, 2019)

◆ **Referring to the recent events in the Middle East: the elections in Israel, the events in Algeria, and the events in Sudan:** Al-Baghdadi addresses his guests, recounting several recent events: Benjamin Netanyahu’s victory in the elections for the premiership of the Israeli government (which he refers to as “the government of the Jews”); the fall of the “tyrant” in Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, and the ousting of President Omar Hassan al-Bashir from power. He stresses that what is most unfortunate is that the people [i.e., the Muslims] have failed to understand that they are replacing one tyrant with another, who will be even worse for the Muslims. He adds: “I want to remind them that **the only effective way to deal with these tyrants is the way of jihad for the sake of Allah**, because through jihad, tyrants are stopped, honor and glory are achieved, since nothing but the sword is effective against these dictators.”

The end of the video

► At the end of the video, one of the participants in the video gives Al-Baghdadi **booklets, each of which bears the name of an ISIS province**. Booklets with the names of the following provinces can be seen: **Al-Sham (Syria), Iraq, Sinai, Khorasan, West Africa,**

Central Africa, Yemen, Somalia, the Caucasus, Turkey (the ITIC is unaware of the establishment of a province in Turkey) **and Tunisia** (one of the booklets bears the word “Tunisia” rather than “Tunisia Province,” apparently because this is a network and not a formal province). The East Asian Province was conspicuous in its absence, but there were two booklets placed next to the two other operatives, one of which was apparently the booklet of this province.



Al-Baghdadi holding a booklet whose cover bears the title “Turkey Province” (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, April 29, 2019)



Al-Baghdadi holding a booklet of the “Yemen Province” with a booklet bearing the title “Somalia Province” next to it (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, April 29, 2019)