



Analysis of the new statement of ISIS spokesman following the normalization agreements between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain

October 27, 2020

Overview

On October 18, 2020, ISIS's Al-Furqan Media Foundation released an audiotape of the **organization's spokesman Abu Hamza Al-Qurashi**. The title of the tape is a verse from the Quran – "So narrate to them stories of the past, so perhaps they will reflect¹". In the 32-minute tape, the spokesman calls for the **overthrow of the "tyrannical" rulers in Arab countries, following the normalization agreements between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain**. ISIS's spokesman calls on the operatives and supporters **to attack Western citizens in Saudi Arabia – which is perceived as the broker of the normalization agreements – and to damage economic infrastructure, for example by setting fire to oil pipelines and factories**. The spokesman **encourages ISIS operatives in various African countries** to continue fighting against the local regimes and **against Western presence in their countries (mentioning France)**. He calls on ISIS the organization's operatives **to liberate ISIS operatives from prisons**, mentioning successful breaks into prisons in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan.



Slide accompanying the audiotape (Telegram, October 18, 2020)

► **This is the third statement of ISIS's Spokesman Abu Hamza al-Qurashi in the year that has passed since his appointment** (following the targeted killing of his predecessor). **His first statement** (November 4, 2019) was an announcement on the appointment of a

¹ Surat al-A'raf, Verse 176. This means that Allah instructed the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, to tell the stories that he had told him, such as the stories of the prophets, to those who are not Muslims, so that they might be able to understand their meaning.

successor to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was eliminated in a targeted killing, and a call on Muslims to avenge his death and pledge allegiance to the new caliph². **His second statement** (January 29, 2020) was a call on Muslims to thwart President Trump's Deal of the Century³. **His current statement** comes in the wake of the normalization of relations between Arab countries and Israel, with Saudi Arabian encouragement.

► In the ITIC's assessment, the spokesman's call to overthrow Arab leaders and carry out attacks in Saudi Arabia is ISIS's reaction to the threat of normalization, as perceived by ISIS. In retrospect, ISIS's encouragement of its operatives and supporters to avenge Al-Baghdadi's death and thwart the Deal of the Century **failed to receive significant attention**. In the ITIC's assessment, this is first and foremost due to the fact that most of ISIS's resources and attention were **allocated to the main goal, which was and remains the rehabilitation of ISIS in its core countries (Iraq and Syria) after the defeats sustained by the organization**.

► While in each of his previous statements, ISIS's spokesman focused on one central issue, **in his current statement he addresses all of ISIS's provinces**, showing that he is well aware of the current situation in each province. His specifically addressing the various provinces is intended, in the ITIC's assessment, to glorify ISIS as an organization operating in many countries around the globe and raise the morale of the operatives mainly in provinces where ISIS suffered defeats (Afghanistan and Yemen). **Especially prominent** in his statement were **Saudi Arabia** (where ISIS has so far not been able to carry out significant attacks) **and the African countries** (where ISIS's activity is getting stronger). ISIS's operatives **in Syria** are praised for their successful attacks against Syrian and Russian soldiers (including the killing of a senior Russian officer) and tribal leaders supporting the Syrian regime. On the other hand, **Iraq**, ISIS's most important province where most of its activity takes place, and the **Sinai Province**, are addressed only briefly.

² See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from November 5, 2019, "ISIS announces appointment of new leader in place of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi."

³ See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from February 2, 2020, "ISIS's spokesman calls on Muslims around the globe to spearhead the struggle to thwart President Trump's plan and calls on ISIS operatives in Sinai and Syria to attack Israeli communities."

Two days after the statement of ISIS's spokesman, **ISIS launched (October 20, 2020) a new terrorist campaign entitled "Raids of Response to the Call [of ISIS's spokesman]."** The campaign was intended to spur ISIS's operatives and supporters in the various provinces **to carry out attacks, thus giving practical meaning to the calls made by the spokesman.** So far, there have been more than 50 attacks as part of the campaign, mainly in Iraq (updated to October 28, 2020). It can be expected that the number will increase.

Call to liberate prisoners

- ▶ Attacks whose purpose is to liberate prisoners **is a familiar activity of ISIS**, dating back to the period when the Islamic State in Iraq was establishing itself during the fighting against the US army. The climax of the campaigns of liberation from prisons in Iraq (Operation Breaking the Walls) was the break into Ghraib Prison, near Baghdad, liberating about 500 jihadi operatives (2013). In his two previous statements, ISIS's spokesman said that **the organization had not forgotten its prisoners and called on its operatives to act towards liberating them. In his current statement, he elaborates on this subject.**
- ▶ The spokesman mentions the break-ins by ISIS operatives into **prisons in Afghanistan⁴ and the Democratic Republic of Congo⁵**. He calls on ISIS operatives in all the provinces to follow in the footsteps of the organization operatives in Khorasan and forcibly liberate ISIS's prisoners. He calls on ISIS's prisoners, men and women, and their children, to wait patiently.
- ▶ ISIS's Al-Naba' weekly published (October 22, 2020) an article addressing the spokesman's statement and the Raids of Response to the Call campaign. The article states that **ISIS's operatives launched the campaign with a significant attack on the main prison in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.** According to the article, the attack on the prison received considerable media attention because it took place two days after the speech by ISIS's spokesman, in which he called for the liberation of prisoners, i.e., ISIS's propaganda presents the attack as a realization of the spokesman's call; in the ITIC's assessment, there is no real basis for that.

⁴ On August 2, 2020, ISIS operatives from the Khorasan Province liberated prisoners from the main prison of the Nangarhar Province in the city of Jalalabad.

⁵ On October 20, 2020, ISIS operatives broke into the main prison in the Beni area, in the northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo. About 1,350 prisoners escaped.



Prison in the Democratic Republic of Congo which was attacked by ISIS, with hundreds of prisoners liberated. The photo appeared on the front page of ISIS's Al-Naba' weekly (Telegram, October 22, 2020).

Main points of ISIS's spokesman

► Following are the main points made by ISIS's Spokesman Abu Hamza al-Qurashi (Telegram, October 18, 2020):

◆ **A call on ISIS operatives in Iraq** to stand firm against attacks by the Iraqi security forces and to exercise forbearance. **The spokesman praises ISIS's operatives in Syria** for their commitment to fighting against the Syrian regime. He also praises the operatives for eliminating **tribal leaders** who support the Syrian regime, **Syrian soldiers and Russian soldiers** (including a high-ranking Russian army commander⁶).

◆ **An attack on the clerics serving the Arab regimes:** At the outset, ISIS's spokesman attacks the clerics serving the "tyrannical" Arab rulers. These clerics, who formerly smeared ISIS and accused it of being an arm of Israel (referred to as "the Jews' statelet"), **now keep silent when the "statelet" of the Emirates and the "statelet" of Bahrain normalize their relations with Israel**, while Israelis fill their countries and Saudi Arabia opens its airspace to Israeli planes.

◆ **Smearing the Saudi regime and calling to act against it:** The spokesman claims that in the holy city of Mecca, places of licentious behavior and alcohol shops open with the support of clerics. The Saudi regime even grants support worth millions of

⁶This is a reference to an attack on a Syrian army convoy near Deir ez-Zor, on August 18, 2020. A senior Russian officer with the rank of major general was killed in the attack.

dollars to the Iraqi-Shiite regime. The spokesman **calls on Muslims (i.e., ISIS supporters) in the Arabian Peninsula** to join the Islamic State. If they are unable to do so, **they must kill Western citizens living among them**. The spokesman also calls on ISIS operatives and supporters **to destroy bars and other places of entertainment where there is licentious behavior and harm Saudi Arabia's economic infrastructure** (for example by burning oil pipelines, factories and other infrastructure which serve as sources of revenues for the Saudi administration, the "tyrannical government)."

◆ **A call on ISIS operatives and Muslims in African countries to overthrow local regimes and attack Western interests:**

- A call on Muslims in **Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Congo, Mali and Chad to attack the regimes ("tyrants") in their countries**, which are pawns in the hands of the West (the "Crusaders"). These regimes, the spokesman adds, work to spread Christianity in their countries. He calls on Muslims in these countries to join ISIS and **set fire to factories owned by Western companies that are exploiting their resources**.

- Praise for ISIS operatives **in West and Central Africa for their activities against France and those affiliated with it** ("Crusader France and its affiliates"). The spokesman also **praises ISIS operatives in Mozambique for their impressive victories** (i.e., their takeover of territory in the northeast of the country). **He calls on them to continue their activity with the goal of overthrowing the regime**. He praises ISIS's operatives **in Somalia** for killing policemen, soldiers and politicians, calling on them to continue in this path.

◆ **The spokesman praises ISIS's operatives in Afghanistan** (Khorasan Province) **for standing firm** against the military operations carried out against them by the Taliban and the international forces (alluding to the blows suffered by ISIS's Khorasan Province last year). He praises the Khorasan Province **for liberating the prisoners from one of the prisons in the Jalalabad Province**. He encourages ISIS operatives in Afghanistan, saying that their situation will get better and that they will have new victories and liberate prisoners from additional prisons in Afghanistan, as happened in the past in Iraq.

◆ **Praise for ISIS operatives in Sinai** for standing firm against the Egyptian army despite President Sisi's ("Pharaoh") determination to exterminate the jihad that they are carrying out. **The spokesman calls on ISIS operatives in the Sinai Peninsula to continue waging a war to the death against the Egyptian army.**

◆ The spokesman addresses **ISIS's operatives in Yemen**, calling on them to act with forbearance and continue to sacrifice for the sake of religion. He adds that there is still a long way to go fighting against the Houthi movement and against Al-Qaeda in Yemen (alluding to the blows suffered by ISIS's Yemen Province in the last months).

◆ At the end of his statement, he turns to the Western countries ("the infidels"), noting that ISIS has not surrendered and that the Islamic State is still standing. He threatens that **ISIS will surprise the infidels in unexpected places and that ISIS operatives will come to the center of the houses** (i.e., to the big cities of the countries of the West). At the end of the audiotape, he says that **the soldiers of the International Coalition in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan will soon pull out from Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan**, not by choice but because of the determination of ISIS operatives who are forcing them to leave⁷.

⁷ This is baseless bragging because internal American considerations are at the basis of the pullout of US forces from Afghanistan and Iraq, and not ISIS attacks. Furthermore, the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Shiite militias handled by Iran in Iraq were the ones that exerted pressure on the American troops in these countries, and not ISIS. In addition, the decrease in the scope of US forces in Syria was not due to ISIS attacks. It seems that the US is not a preferred target for ISIS in the Syrian arena.