

# Program on Extremism

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## THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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### *Say upon them to strive*

A speech by Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi

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What follows is a summary of Islamic State leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi's thirty-minute speech *Say upon them to strive*. The title of the speech, *وقل اعلموا*, is based on a quote from a Quranic verse, [Sura Al-Tawba \[9\], Verse 105](#): "Say [Prophet], 'Take action! God will see your actions- as will His Messenger and the believers- and then you will be returned to Him who knows what is seen and unseen, and He will tell you what you have been doing.'"

#### **0-7:09 minutes**

- Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the Leader of the Islamic State, opens his speech with reciting verses for Quran that promise the Mujahideen victories. He also warned those who deviate from the righteous path that defeat and God's punishments await them.
- Then, he brings relevant Hadith, narrations and sayings of Muhammad, to reaffirm the promise of victory to the righteous.
- At this point he started pleading for the Mujahideen to be patient and steadfast in the face of hardship.

#### **7:10-17:14 minutes**

- Al-Baghdadi pivoted to ongoing affairs, criticizing 'oppressive' regimes and praising his caliphate, referring to it as though it has not collapsed.
- Again, he refers to the caliphate as an ongoing project that is still making advancement and scoring victories.

#### ***A quick return to the world stage. Why?***

Not since Al-Baghdadi stood at the pulpit of Mosul's Al-Nuri mosque in 2014 has such little time passed between his public speeches. On April 29 this year al-Baghdadi made only his second appearance on video in a message titled "[In the hospitality of amir al-mu'minin](#)". Given the risks associated with the Islamic State using senior leaders as messengers for its propaganda, there would have to be a belief within the organization that the benefits of al-Baghdadi delivering this message outweighs those significant risks. In both content and timing it seems unlikely that Al-Baghdadi was looking to inject his views into escalating Iran-Saudi tensions. Rather, two factors were probably central to the decision. First, the recent push by Al-Qaida propagandists to re-establish Al-Qaida as the leader of the transnational jihad and, second, Islamic State's establishment of a centralized node for command and control. Demonstrating leadership in the wide Salafi-Jihadi movement and the capacity to centrally plan and globally implementing its insurgent operations, the Islamic State reminded its adversaries that it is far from defeated.

- Ensuing, he turns to describing the deeds of the fighters of the Islamic State to promising the Muslim and Sunni populations that members of the Islamic State are still steadfast and fighting the forces of the unbelievers.
- Al-Baghdadi speaks with a joyous tone about the Islamic State's centrally coordinated and planned operations (غزوات: *ghazawāt*), claiming that they are unprecedented in the modern jihadi history.
- In making the case for the unprecedented nature of these operations, Al-Baghdadi cites the following:
  - The operation to avenge the people of the levant: a four-day operation that took place in 8 countries and consisted of 92 single operations.
  - The first attrition operation: a three-days operation that took place in 11 countries and was made up of 61 single operations.
  - The second attrition operation: a ten-days operation that took place in 10 provinces and encompassed 152 single operations.
- Al-Baghdadi cites the United States plea for other coalition nations to commit more to the fight against the Islamic State and he frames this as a sign of weakness. In making his point, he claimed the United States was dragged into a lot of theaters, including Mali and Niger, and continued with citing the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's, Joseph Dunford, statement that the United States does not have the resource to protect their allies in the region.
- He then turns to fighters of the Islamic State and promise them victory, calling on them to double their effort and the pivotal roles of their proselytization, media, military, and security functions.

#### ***Expanding & Spreading***

Al-Baghdadi outlines the strategic shift of his organization from *baqiyyah wa tatamaddad* (enduring and expanding) to *tatamaddad wa tantashir* (expanding and spreading). Under this configuration, the Islamic State centrally commands a network of insurgent groups around the world. By doing so, Al-Baghdadi is likely seeking to demonstrate that the Islamic State can survive an ongoing counterterrorism campaign against it and [out-compete](#) its rivals for leadership of the global jihad, Al-Qaida, by highlighting its coordinated activities in the field.

#### **17:15-30minutes**

- Al-Baghdadi then pivots to identifying 4 important issues for members of the Islamic State to focus their attention.
  - Proselytization: regarding this point he stress the importance of engaging Muslim populations to educate them on the principal teachings of Islam and the necessity of jihad against 'oppressive' regimes.
  - Accepting the repentance of those who seek redemption: He described this as the door still open to join the Islamic State.
  - Devotion to God: A source of strength and patience especially given the Islamic State is outpowered and outnumbered.
  - Injustices: Al-Baghdadi order his fighters to be 'just.'

- Al-Baghdadi pokes at un-Islamic and nationalist movements around the Middle East including: Palestinian territories, Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Yemen. He claims that these project result in ending the life of people for the sake of nationalism and democracy. He argues that the outlined movements within these nations are not concerned with the well-being of their people. Then he contrasts the values and work of the Islamic State with those who are not protecting local populations.
- The speech ends with injustice committed against members of the Islamic State in prisons and IDP camps. He calls on fighters to strive to free women, children, and men. He also orders his fighters to target those running or working in such facilities. Al-Baghdadi talked in length about the women of the Islamic State in prisons and IDP camps, including, their suffering and humiliation. He called on women to be patient and stay on the Islamic State's path and promised to avenge for their suffering.

#### ***'Responsibility to Protect' appeals***

Woven throughout the second half of Al-Baghdadi's speech are the dual narratives of injustice and cruelty against Muslims, especially Islamic State members, and the responsibility of Muslims to do all they can to protect their fellow Muslims. These ['Responsibility to Protect'](#) (R2P) appeals are hallmarks of Islamic State propaganda and typically mix supposedly legal arguments with emotional stories of death and destruction to justify Islamic State's violence – whether on the battlefields of the Middle East or the streets of the West – as a defensive and reciprocal act. In his closing remarks, Al-Baghdadi highlights the plight of women and [children](#), imploring his fighters to free them and punish their captors. This focus reaffirms the Islamic State's narrative that the organization is committed to protecting its most vulnerable constituency.

#### **The 'guerrilla caliph' speaks again**

Three key themes dominate Al-Baghdadi's latest speech. First, like previous speeches, he is seeking to both rally Islamic State's supporters – those 'true believers' that will prove so essential to their survival during these hard times – and demonstrate that he and his movement remain at the helm of the global jihad. Second, Islamic State's propagandists continue to focus on telling its supporters to remain committed to the movement's *manhaj* to reverse its flagging fortunes. Finally, the Islamic State appears to be shifting its organizational configuration. It established a [logistical, command and control node](#) in Iraq after its material collapse in eastern Syria, managing to improve its insurgent capabilities. Al-Baghdadi stressed the central coordination aspect of the three major transnational operations highlighted in his speech. If true, the Islamic State can now be described as "[a clandestine insurgency in-theatre and a global terrorist network out-of-theatre.](#)" This operational approach could allow the group to enforce its *tatamaddad wa tantashir* (expanding and spreading) maxim for years to come.

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