

Guest Post: Sheikh Ayman az-Zawahiri annuls Islamic State of Iraq and as-Sham

Ayman al-Zawahiri

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[Please note: Images may have been removed from this document. Page numbers may have been added.]

This post is a slightly altered copy of Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's blog (Aymenn agreed by the way ...). Aymenn's text is in italic font, my additions are in bold.

It has been several months that our little club of analysts (the usual bunch) had no real confirmation about what was going on in the ranks of Syria's most important Jihadi movement. As already pointed out before in several blogpost by both Aymenn and myself there was a schism within the movement.

Although today's information did not reach us via official Jihadi channels it seems legit. A letter by Ayman az-Zawahiri was posted on the al-Jazeera website:
<http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/710586-ayman-zawahiri.html#document/p1>

A theory by @khalidelmousiou is that this letter by Doctor az-Zawahiri got leaked to al-Jazeera by some elements in Jabhat an-Nusra or the Islamic State in Iraq and as-Sham. The media silence by the group on this new statement may be explained by the fact they first would like to identify the mole. Though, it might well be believed that al-Manara al-Bayda, the official media-channel of Jabhat an-Nusra will be releasing a statement by Muhammad al-Jawlani anytime soon.

Here is Aymenn's blog:

Below I give my translation of an alleged statement from Sheikh Ayman az-Zawahiri on the abrogation of Islamic State of Iraq and as-Sham, via Basma Atassi of Al-Jazeera. In light of this statement, I reverse my earlier position of doubt on the authenticity of Jawlani's letter provided by Zaid Benjamin. Both reporters deserve credit.

I myself do remain a bit sceptical on the alleged letter by Muhammad al-Jawlani as posted by Zaid Benjamin. The reactions by some Jihadi's on Twitter were quite harsh. As for example this tweet by an emir of Jabhat an-Nusra : [Arabic characters removed] (Where did you get this ? Fear God)

Here is the text published by Ziad Benjamin. A translation can be found on Aymenn's blog.

This statement by Sheikh al-Zawahiri contains several notable points, including (i) the abrogation of Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS), (ii) a denial of consultation on Sheikh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's announcement in April of a merger between Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN) and Islamic State of Iraq, pace my belief and that of many analysts at the time that the order for a

merger came from Zawahiri (a notable dissenting voice to this view was my friend Oskar Svadkovsky, though I should add that Sheikh Zawahiri has never viewed Sheikh Baghdadi as a liability as regards his tactics: that was more true of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi).

Sheikh Zawahiri's and Jowlani's statements are an attempt to revert to the pre-April status quo but it remains unclear if any damage that has been done can be repaired. Basma Atassi is certainly right about ISIS tensions with JAN in the Aleppo area, in other places it is complicated (for example, in Deraa I only observe JAN symbols: a sign of rejection of ISIS?), but in Raqqah Governorate the two are basically interchangeable (see my latest Jihadology post). It is also true, as Atassi notes, that the majority of at least foreign mujahideen in Syria now use the ISIS banner. In any event, internal rivalries in both groups are not to be ignored either.

Translation

“In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful:

[...]

[To] the noble brother: His Excellence Sheikh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini, and his brothers in the Shura of the Islamic State of Iraq, may God protect them.

[To] the noble brother: His Excellence Sheikh Abu Mohammed al-Jowlani, and his brothers in the Shura of Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl ash-Sham, may God protect them.

Salaam Alaykum wa rahmat Allah wa barakaatuhu. I hope that you and those with you are well, and that God is bringing us together in what He loves and is pleased with from the glory of the world and the attainment of the Hereafter. And following:

1. The people of Jihad became saddened- all of them- at the dispute which arose and appeared in the relations between our beloved brothers in the Islamic State of Iraq and Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl ash-Sham.
2. And what happened on the part of both parties- in which we were not sought for giving orders and which we did not seek to propagate, but also we did not know about it- and the grief we heard was from media.
3. First, it is inevitable that I remind all the mujahideen and Muslims of the role of the Islamic State of Iraq in resisting the Crusader plan for making an alliance with and dividing the heart of the Muslim world, and their resistance of the aggressive Safavid-Rafidite expansionism into Iraq, ash-Sham and the Arabian Peninsula.

And it is inevitable that we praise the good deeds of our brothers in the Islamic State of Iraq and their head and amir: Sheikh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in extending the jihad into ash-Sham with the best of men and his honouring them with financial support over adversity in which they are supported and judged. But we also have affection for our beloved people and brothers in Jabhat

al-Nusra on account of the praise of Sheikh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his brothers for them and their amir Abu Mohammed al-Jowlani.

4. It is also inevitable that I remind all the mujahideen and Muslims of the role of our brothers in Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl ash-Sham in their reviving of the obligation of Jihad in Sham ar-Rabat and the Jihad; and their reviving the hope of the Muslim Ummah in liberating Al-Aqsa and the establishment of the guiding Khilafa with God's permission. Likewise, [it is inevitable that I mention] their resistance to the Safavid, Rafidite, Batinite and secular enemy on the harbour of Islam in beloved Sham. And it is inevitable that we mention with appreciation their recognition of their brothers in Islamic State of Iraq for what they have brought for them as regards help, aid and assistance.

5. When the disagreement between the two excellent and interlinked groups of mujahideen was made public, I touched on the matters of the disagreement in a message from me on 1 Jumada ath-Thaniya 1434 to the two excellent Sheikhs Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini and Abu Mohammed al-Jowlani for a freezing of the situation that existed before the disagreement for the right time to pass judgment.

6. Messages from both parties and others reached me, and based on this, I, after consultation with my brothers in Khorasan and elsewhere, and after consulting my Lord- Subhaanuhu wa Ta'aala...- for guidance in the face of my weakness and lack of strategem, with the reason of hoping to extinguish the fire of Fitna and the disagreement between the two noble and exalted groups, I have made a decision on the matter- must'aeaban Allah- as follows:

a) Sheikh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was in error in his announcement of the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham without seeking our order, consulting us or even informing us.

b) Sheikh Abu Mohammed al-Jowlani was in error of his announcement of the rejection of the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham and made clear his relation with al-Qa'ida without seeking our order, consulting us, or even informing us.

c) The Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham is cancelled, and work continues under the name of Islamic State of Iraq.

d) Jabhat al-Nusra is a separate entity for Jamaat Qa'ida al-Jihad [i.e. al-Qa'ida], following the general leadership

e) The realm of Islamic State of Iraq is Iraq.

f) The realm of Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl ash-Sham is Syria.

g) Sheikh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini is to remain amir of Islamic State of Iraq for the period of one year from the point of this ruling, after which the Shura Council of the Islamic State of Iraq is to issue a report to the general leadership for Jamaat Qa'ida al-Jihad about the course of operations, with the general leadership making a decision after this on whether to

continue having Sheikh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini as amir or having a new amir come to power.

h) Sheikh Abu Mohammed al-Jowlani is to remain amir of Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl ash-Sham for a period of one year from the point of this ruling, and after this the Shura Council of Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl ash-Sham is to issue a report to the general leadership of Jamaat Qa'ida al-Jihad about the course of operations, with the general leadership making a decision after this on whether to continue having Sheikh Abu Mohammed al-Jowlani as amir or having a new amir come to power.

i) Islamic State of Iraq is to provide support for Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl ash-Sham- as far as it can- for what Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl ash-Sham seeks as regards reinforcements in terms of men, arms, wealth, shelter and protection.

j) Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl ash-Sham is to provide support for Islamic State of Iraq- as far as it can- for what Islamic State of Iraq seeks as regards reinforcements in terms of men, arms, wealth, shelter and protection.

k) The two parties are to desist from any enmity in speech or deed against the other party.

l) It is obligatory on both parties and on all the mujahideen to respect the inviolability of the Muslims in their blood, support and wealth, and not one of them is to attack a Muslim or Mujahid except on the authority of a judicial ruling, with its decision making its minimum clear.

m) Every Muslim is sacrosanct to the Muslim, and so anyone who moves from one Jihad group to another is not counted as an outsider, or from one front to another, but for said person there is the sacrosanctity of the Muslim and the mujahid, even if we disapprove of his moving.

n) Anyone who becomes involved in spilling of blood of his Muslim brothers and the Mujahideen, the group will seek a firm stance against him on the basis of defending virtue and preventing vice.

o) His Excellence Sheikh Abu Khalid as-Souri is among the best known and experienced of the living mujahideen, even as we do not praise him over God, and he is appointed our representative in ash-Sham on the following matters:

(i)- Judgment on any disagreement in interpretation of this ruling falls on him.

(ii) In the event of any transgression by one of the parties against the other, he has the authority to set up a Shari'a court to judge on the dispute.

p) I make it obligatory on all my brothers in Jamaat Qa'ida al-Jihad, and I ask all my Muslim brothers and Mujahideen to desist from enmity in this disagreement, to refrain from provocation among the Mujahideen, and to work for the restoration of harmony, as well as unity and the unification of hearts, and the unity of ranks among the Muslims and Mujahideen.

And may they know the power and authority of these two noble groups of Mujahideen, and only speak good of them.

7. A copy of this ruling has been sent to everyone from:

- a) Islamic State of Iraq
- b) Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl ash-Sham
- c) His Excellence Sheikh Abu Khalid as-Souri

(‘Verily I only desire reform to the best of my power, and I cannot give guidance except by God: in Him I trust and to Him I repent’ - Qur’an 11:88).

Your brother:

Aymenn al-Zawahiri

13 Rajab 1434

Markaz al-Fajr lil-‘Ilam

Courtesy of Pieter Van Ostaeyen
Pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com