



# ZAWAHIRI: DENOUNCING ISIS'S LEGITIMACY IN *ISLAMIC SPRING* SERIES

## Islamic Spring Series

The *Islamic Spring* is an audio series from al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. This analysis reviews the first six episodes – all 19 to 43 minutes in length – released between September 9 and October 9, 2015.

The *Islamic Spring* series is the first time the group has commented on their operational strategy since September 2014, when Zawahiri announced the creation of al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent.



Still image of Ayman al-Zawahiri from the *Islamic Spring* series

## Intelligence Gaps

- Are major themes in the *Islamic Spring* series echoed by Zawahiri in private communications?
- Did strict operational security concerns dictate a delayed dissemination of the *Islamic Spring* series?
- If the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) loses popularity, what effect, if any, will the *Islamic Spring* series have on current and potential ISIS fighters?

For more information, please contact NJOHSP's Analysis Bureau at [analysis@njohsp.gov](mailto:analysis@njohsp.gov) or 609-584-4000

Al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri is shifting al-Qa'ida's propaganda focus from the United States to ISIS, his group's chief rival for leadership of global jihad. According to an NJOHSP review of the *Islamic Spring*, the first six episodes contain criticism of ISIS's tactics and its self-proclaimed "caliphate," while Zawahiri only calls for attacks against the United States twice.

- Denouncing ISIS is al-Qa'ida's top messaging priority in the *Islamic Spring* series. Nearly half of Zawahiri's references – 391 of 850 – criticize the group, call ISIS's caliphate illegitimate, and condemn the group's stance on breaking allegiance pledges. Nonetheless, Zawahiri acknowledges ISIS's actions could be forgiven and future collaboration between al-Qa'ida and ISIS is possible, especially against common enemies such as the United States, Europe, and Iran.
- Only one percent of references in the audio – nine in all – call for attacks in the West or the United States.
- Criticizing the far enemy – the United States, Europe, Israel, and secularists – was the third most referenced theme in the first six episodes while disparaging the near enemy, governments in Muslim majority countries, got far fewer references. This is consistent with the strategic intent that al-Qa'ida has expressed since before 9/11. Other notable themes focused on the group's future, addressing unity among Muslims, the ideal road to a legitimate caliphate, and lauding al-Qa'ida's activities.

## Important Themes Mentioned in the *Islamic Spring* Series

