



NJOHSP

EXECUTIVE INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

JUNE 27, 2016

Zawahiri: Reasserting Authority

In May, al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released an audio message in an effort to reestablish his leadership of the global Salafi-jihadist movement. The statement, *Go Forth to the Levant*, addresses al-Qa'ida's Syrian affiliate, the Nusra Front, mujahidin in the Levant—encompassing Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and Israel—and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

- Zawahiri cautions the Nusra Front—one of al-Qa'ida's most active and capable affiliates—against leaving the al-Qa'ida network. While acknowledging how “precious” the group is to al-Qa'ida, he warns that working with Western countries and their allies will result in the Nusra Front losing power and its members being imprisoned.



Screen shot from *Go Forth to the Levant*. The text reads: “*Go Forth to the Levant* by Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri, may God protect him.”

- Zawahiri makes several pleas for unity among all mujahidin in the Levant, resuming an important theme from the multi-part Islamic Spring propaganda series issued in 2015. He highlights the common enemy all mujahidin share, namely the West and specifically the United States, and implies the mujahidin should unite under al-Qa'ida's banner.
- Zawahiri also criticizes ISIS's legitimacy. He insults ISIS's leader and uses his real name—a deliberate refusal to accept Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's leadership. He also calls the group “new Kharijites,” an insult that compares ISIS to a seventh-century group that violently rebelled against established Islamic authority.

Contact Information

For more information, please contact NJOHSP's Analysis Bureau at analysis@njohsp.gov or 609-584-4000.