



The Corona Pandemic

An Opportunity for ISIS

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ISIS is interpreting the above pandemic as a divine intervention, propelled by a divine plan to punish the infidels. Per it, the world, the west in particular, fell into hard times manifested by an economic crisis, low civilian morale and increasing attrition of its security forces due to their allocation for additional public safety and civilian assistance duties. Per ISIS, should the trend continue it will lead to anarchy and therefore they need to capitalize on the west's current weakness and execute quality attacks as has happened in Paris, Brussels and other countries.

The Corona as a Divine Plan

On February 2nd, 2020, in vol. 220 of its official publication, **al-Naba**, ISIS first addressed the Corona pandemic in China. It explained that as time goes by the scope of the pandemic is revealed and the virus will spread globally and will be disastrous for humanity.

It interpreted the pandemic as a divine punishment imposed on China for its oppression policy against its Muslim residents, manifested by murder, incarceration, expulsion, distancing them from their religion, and by allowing their lives, property and honor to fall prey to others. It said that the enemy is worthy of condemnation in this world and in the afterlife. Per it, this punishment was imposed throughout history, on other people for their sins, such as the Aad¹ and Thamud², the Pharaoh's people and some of the Israelites. Indeed, the faithful and even some prophets and Muhammad's friends have been hit by plagues, but there is a fundamental distinction between them and the infidels. Where the former prayed to Allah to remove the plague, repented and waited patiently for Allah's decision on their reward if any, the others failed to comprehend that the plague was delivered by god for their sins, they didn't repent or prayed to Allah to save them. In fact, they continue to sin³.

On February 27th, 2020, ISIS reiterated that the pandemic is the product of god's plan that proves that the polytheists do not follow the righteous path. Moreover, even if there are amongst them some people who have turned to god for help, then the lapse as soon as things improve. Per ISIS, even among Muslims there are people who wrongly prayed for Allah in an indirect way to cure them, e.g. through visiting holy graves, wallow in the dirt and other rituals that are typical of the Shiite and the Sufi⁴.

¹ An ancient Arab people mentioned in the Quran that was decimated by Allah for their sins and their refusal to accept the divine agency of the prophet Hud (al-Quran, Sura 7; 65)

² An ancient Arab people mentioned in the Quran that was decimated by Allah for their sins and their refusal to listen to the prophet Salih (al-Quran, Sura 7; 73-79).

³ Al-Naba vol. 220 P. 10

⁴ Al-Naba vol. 223, P. 3.

Infection Precautions for Muslims

ISIS warned that millions of Muslims staying in China may contract the virus and infect others upon their return home. In light of the above ISIS demanded Muslims to take the necessary precautions and avoid travelling or leaving infected areas, pray that the pandemic would not hit Muslims or Muslim territories and heal all infected Muslims⁵. On March 12th, ISIS even posted hygiene instructions to its followers (see photo)⁶.



The Corona as an Opportunity to Renew Terror Attacks in the West

On March 19th, 2020, on the backdrop of the pandemic, ISIS charted a strategic plan under the title “Crusaders’ Biggest Nightmare”. At the outset they said that Allah has punished the world, infidels in particular, and managed to put fear in them. Additionally, the pandemic caused people to be quarantined at their homes and collapsed the markets into an economic crisis. Per the organization, the spread of Corona is an opportunity to capitalize on now and launch attacks on the west, in the west for



An excerpt from “Crusaders Biggest Nightmare”, *al-Naba*, vol. 226, P. 3

the following reasons: (i) the peoples of the world and especially the “crusaders” (the west) allocate massive resources to fight the spread of the pandemic. Therefore, their security forces are tied to public safety and civilian assistance duties; (ii) the fear of an economic hardship that will hurt the poor as a result of the markets decline; (iii) the possibility of chaos and anarchy that will be manifested in an increase of attacks against people and property. “The last thing they would want is to send additional soldiers to regions where there is a chance for a spread of the disease, or they will have to concentrate military and security forces inside the country to focus on dispersing assemblies and mitigate friction between people [...]”.

Per ISIS, the immediate need to contend with the pandemic and the latter’s economic and social ramifications become a heavy burden for the governments, especially in light of the efforts they put into mitigating mujahidin attacks on western soil or attacks against their allies in Muslim territories. Per ISIS, this burden even takes a toll on coordinating joint operations of coalition states.

Therefore, ISIS is of the opinion that now is an opportune time to hit them in the west, “the last thing they want today is that during these trying times, the caliphate soldiers will prepare to hit them like they hit Paris, London, Brussels and [other] cities. Moreover, in some places security and medical personnel are stretched very thin so the last thing they wish is to be surprised by the mujahidin as has happened during the time of the great Muslim conquests [seventh century A.D. with the emergence of Islam]. Further, their armies have become

⁵ *Al-Naba* vol. 220, P. 10.

⁶ *Al-Naba* vol. 221, P. 12.

paralyzed due to the limits on their movements, budget cuts and their preparation to withdraw back to their homelands, hence they wish that the fire of revenge will subside among the mujahidin, “they dream that the people who believe in the singularity of Allah will pity their situation that worsens by the day with the emergence of signs of a financial crisis worse [than those] that hit them a decade ago”.

In light of these developments ISIS advocates leveraging the current conditions in the west to avenge everything they did to the Muslims. Further, they accused the west of committing a series of crimes against Muslims: incarcerating tens of thousands of Muslims under poor conditions; incarcerating (under poor conditions) Muslim refugees; imposing siege on Muslims in Baghuz, Mosul, Sirt and other cities that led to famine and disease; murdering Muslims in various methods such as air strikes, phosphorous bombs without sparing women and children. Per ISIS, even today the west continues to commit crimes against Muslims everywhere, e.g. bombing Muslim homes and killing children in Khurasan (Afghanistan), Central Africa, Somalia and other countries, in addition the assistance they provide their allies with. At the same breath ISIS calls for the liberation of Muslim prisoners from western prisons.

Further, ISIS calls upon its supporters to show no mercy to the infidels, leverage their recent plights to make them carry a heavier burden so as to weaken them further and prevent them from hurting Muslims. Per ISIS, the west and its allies need to consider that the financial losses and the need to protect their homelands from enemies, either inside or outside, will greatly affect them and their ability to fight the mujahidin will weaken⁷.

Shattering U.S.’ Image as an Immune Superpower

On March 26th, 2020, ISIS, criticized all those who see the U.S. as a superpower immune to vulnerabilities such as the Corona pandemic and that everything on earth, whether good or bad, is done with its knowledge and consent. Per ISIS, viewing the U.S. in this light leads many to work with the U.S. and appease it. For example, people thought that the U.S. spread the pandemic in China to weaken its economy but with the spread of the disease to Europe, a U.S. ally, people thought that it was spread to cull the population of the elderly. Per ISIS, at the end of the day, the pandemic hit the U.S. as well and is threatening its economy and security and there, too, people spread stories that the disease was spread by the administration to make the Americans more resilient in the future. Yet, this is a folly since the U.S. is not omnipotent and cannot contend with anything and everything and moreover, Allah is the one who decides who will be hurt by the disease⁸.

⁷ *Al-Naba* vol. 226, P. 3.

⁸ *Al-Naba* vol. 227, P. 3.

Summary

It is evident that ISIS wishes to leverage the global Corona crisis to promote a new wave of attacks in the west. To do that they nurture the narrative that the pandemic is the result of a divine intervention that benefits the faithful and provides them with an opportunity to hit the infidels when the latter are at a low point and experience growing hardships. Therefore, one must use the opportunity and strike additional blows in the west. That said, the pandemic is far from over and its ramifications may be severe on all levels, however despite any difficulty or hardship it would be best if western security and intelligence services will not make light of the threat and demonstrate that counterterrorism activity in the west continues as usual despite the pandemic, so as to deter any potential attack inspired by the above calls for action by ISIS.

ABOUT THE ICT

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The Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group (JWMG) is a specialized research and analysis team at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT). Composed of researchers fluent in Arabic, the JWMG monitors websites that support and serve the Global Jihad organizations. The

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