

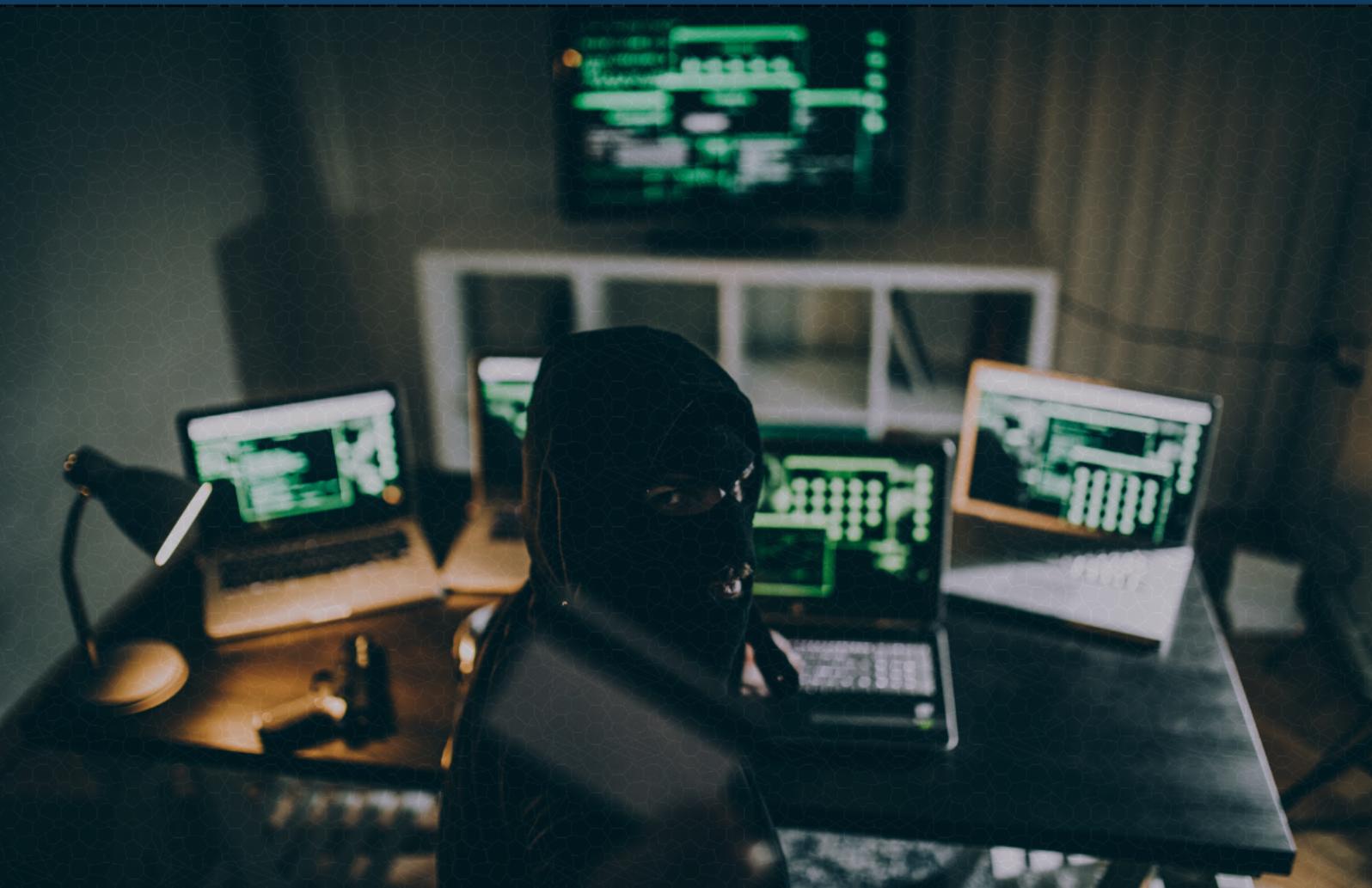


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REPORT

# "MEDIA IS HALF OF JIHAD"- AN INTERVIEW WITH PROMINENT PRO AL- QAEDA TRANSLATION ARM- ISLAMIC TRANSLATION CENTRE (ITC)

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*This is an independent research effort undertaken by the author and is in no way affiliated with or represents the organisation's view.*

*The opinion of the interviewee does not represent the views of the author or the organisation.*

### **Summary**

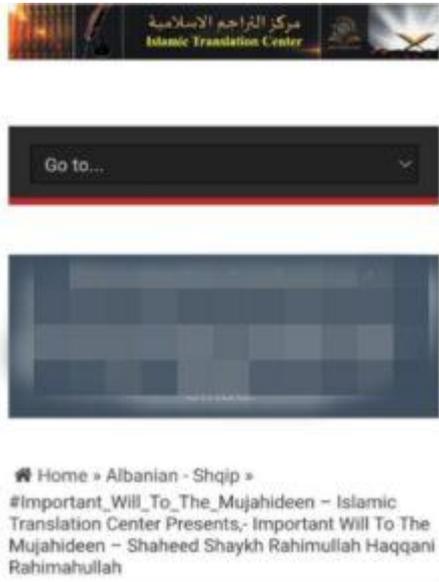
The Islamic State (IS) has been successfully diversifying its appeal and outreach as its aligned media groups like the Islamic State in Khorasan province's [official Al Azaim media, pro-IS Halummu](#) and [l'Ilam foundation](#) prioritised translation efforts as a part of IS global media communication strategy. Al-Qaeda (AQ) on the other hand has faltered in its attempt to directly reach out to different ethnic communities from across the globe owing to the AQ's official or aligned propaganda outlets not devoting the majority of their energies to the translation front.

This changed when the [Islamic Translation Centre \(ITC\) emerged last year in June 2021 as AQ's young media translation unit](#) for buttressing AQ's messaging propaganda to a global audience. Within the pro-AQ media ecosystem, it is the sole multifaceted, multi-language archival website that publishes translations of AQ and its affiliates' official media content including attack claims, speeches of existing and deceased AQ leaders –Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al Zawahiri – video releases, and books into 29 different languages. These include Pashto, Arabic, Farsi, Indonesien, Ruáingga, Hindi, Malayalam, Assamese, French, German, Swedish, Albanian, Swahili, Portuguese, Spanish, etc.

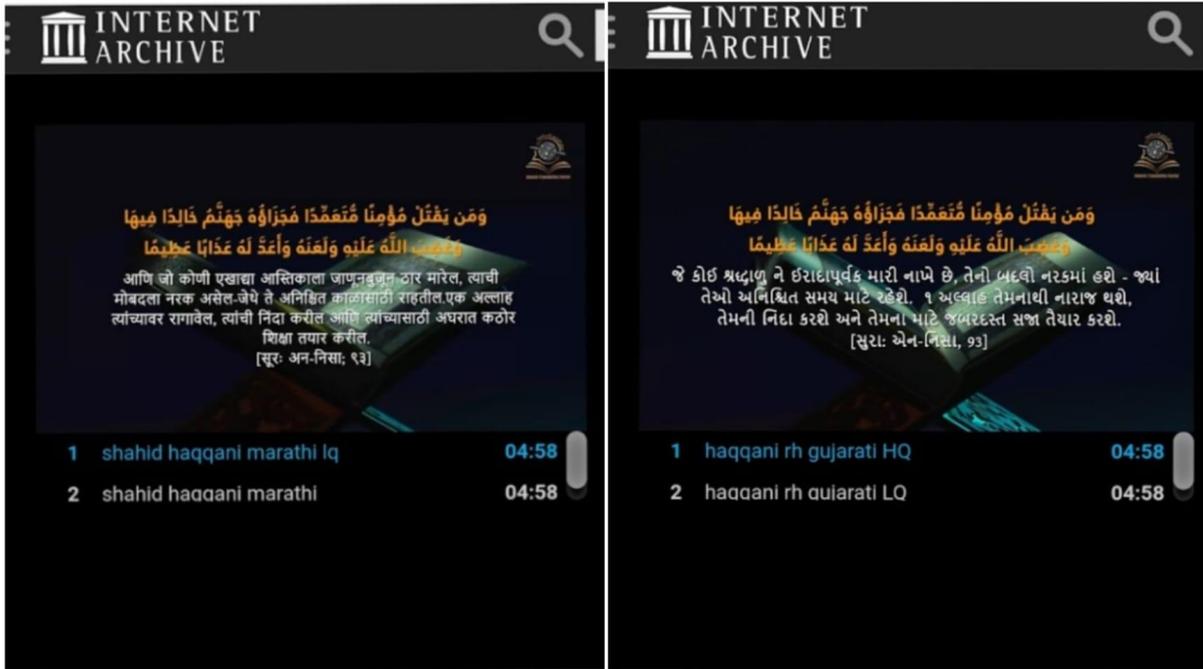
What is striking about ITC's website is that most of the newly uploaded translated [material is about Al Qaeda's India-centric propaganda and Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent's \(AQIS\) media output. Then AQ leader Ayman Al Zawahiri's speech attempting to incite](#) Indian Muslims over the controversy of the hijab ban in Karnataka and AQIS's statement of launching suicide attacks in India's big cities over BJP spokesperson's blasphemous remarks on Prophet Mohammad were translated into multiple Indian regional languages including Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati and Marathi amongst others. Another conspicuous feature of pro-AQ ITC is that it is primarily a translation project that outsources its work to pro-AQ supporters. It invites these individuals to work as pro bono translators by asking them to translate AQ's official media material into their regional/ vernacular languages. Through the unpaid labour of its adherents, ITC facilitates making AQ's propaganda messaging highly accessible to AQ's target audience with weekly updated translated content published into myriad languages on its website. ITC has been smoothly running its media operations since its inception as its website hasn't [faced bans or any takedowns by tech giants](#). To exercise cyber security, the contributors are asked to use a VPN to hide their real IP address to evade the threat of surveillance by security agencies.

The longevity of its digital media presence coupled with the evolving interest of AQ supporters in contributing to the ITC's project in the capacity of anonymous translators underlines the influential role it [will play in the pro-AQ media ecosystem. Though a nascent media translation](#) initiative, it would be interesting to see how ITC plans on expanding the scope and dynamic of its media operations through its growing pool of pro-bono translators, especially those hailing from India.

Pro-AQ ITC is active on Chirpwire, on the encrypted app Telegram, and on AQ’s Rocket.chat server “GeoNews”. To know more in-depth about ITC’s internal media structuring and media operations, their special focus on India and their insights about the heated confrontation between IS and AQ in the media realm, I interviewed one of ITC’s administrators. The contact was established ethically by approaching them as a researcher on the official user ID provided by ITC, after which I sent them a list of questions.



Capitalising on the growing communal clashes and the grievances of the Muslim community, Indian contributors to the ITC translated the script of AQ’s propaganda video “Muslims are on the verge of genocide in India” into Hindi and other languages.



Translation of Sheikh Rahimullah Haqqani’s lecture in Gujarati and Marathi published by ITC. A Taliban cleric and a vocal critic of IS- Sheikh Rahimullah Haqqani was killed in an ISIS-claimed attack in Kabul in August 2022.



Osama Bin Laden’s speech translated into 29 different languages by ITC

# ***An Interview with an ITC administrator***

*The script of the Interview has been thoroughly edited for avoiding platforming the interviewee's views.*

## **1) Admin of Islamic translation services, can you please introduce yourself and tell in a bit of detail about this media initiative?**

In the name of Allah the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful, the Lord of the worlds and the only one worthy of worship. Prayer and peace be upon the Messenger of Allah, his family, his companions and his followers. To proceed, My name is [redacted], and I am responsible for overseeing various projects of ITC. Several other brothers help me in this endeavour. However, I think it is more pertinent to speak about ITC as a project and not to focus on individuals. ITC or the Islamic Translation Centre is a project run by volunteers. Our goal is to amplify and spread the works of the Mujahideen leaders and righteous scholars of the Muslim Ummah. We deem this task to be very important. In the future, we would also like to move into making our productions, God willing.

## **2) When did your organisation "ITC" become functional?**

We came up with the idea for ITC around Shaban, 1442 Hijri (March 2021). After much deliberation and some preparations, ITC started its journey in Dhul Al Qidah, 1442 Hijri (June 2021). We would prefer not to discuss our members.

## **3) What was the thought behind introducing the concept of pro-bono translators?**

There are several reasons with lack of manpower being one of the most important reasons. Another key reason was the matter of expediency. It is much easier to get volunteers than to build an extended team of translators for many different languages. There are many Muslims out there who want to help the project for "Global Islamic Revival", but are not able to do that, due to different circumstances. We hoped to utilise this underused potential of the Ummah, through the initiative of ITC.

## **4) Can you please tell me how many active contributors are part of this project? Also, most of the contributors are from which region?**

As I said, it is a project run by volunteers from many different countries and regions. May Allah accept them all. Our volunteer members are located in various continents and regions. So far we have published translations in more than 30 languages. We have at least one translator for each language. Usually, it is more than around 3. You get an idea about the basic range from the above information. I understand that we have brothers who are from different regions and India as well. However, our pro bono translator pool is still quite limited and we would like to increase it quite a bit. Coordination is always difficult when working with volunteers, but Alhamdulillah Allah has eased the affair for us. We would like more volunteer contributors, to increase our output and ensure the quality of the output.

**5) Is your organisation exclusively dedicated to translating the official works of the Al-Qaeda organisation? And have you received any feedback regarding your media initiative from Al Qaeda's central command?**

The heads of disbelief; the elite, and the apostate western governments control the masses through manipulating information, propaganda and disinformation. The methods are ancient, only the mediums have changed and become more sophisticated. Therefore it is necessary to use modern mediums to "spread the truth" which is why Shaykh Usama, Shaykh Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri and other prominent mujahideen leaders and scholars have repeatedly emphasized the necessity of the media aspect of Jihad. Our work is not exclusively focused on propagating the works of al-Qaeda and its branches. However, as Al-Qaeda is the global leader of the jihad movement and has a much larger media presence, more focus is given to their material. As long as a group is free from major kufr or major creedal deviance we will try to spread their message to the best of our ability. And yes, we have received general encouragement and guidance from some brothers in As-Sahab, and Al-Kataib media organisations. We have also translated works of independent ideologues.

**6) On your website, a major chunk of translations are of those in which Al Zawahiri is seen discussing at length about India's internal affairs and these speeches have been widely translated into various Indian vernacular languages. What is the reason for this special focus on India?**

Alhamdulillah, we have translated books, and audio speeches of mujahideen scholars into 29 languages, but we have observed that a recent uptick of translations has been in the following Indian languages – Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Marathi, Assamese, Odia, apart from Arabic, Farsi and English. This is because focusing on India is a matter of necessity. This requires focusing on the major languages of the Indian subcontinent but also communicating what is happening in India to a greater audience in the west and the greater Muslim world. Apart from the human catastrophes that have been unleashed, the western world and the so-called "international community" are enabling the Hindutva movement because of material interests and geostrategic calculations. Thus it is mandatory for the whole world, not just the Muslim Ummah, to focus on India, to focus on the Muslims in India. But unfortunately, this region does not get as much attention in the international media. Therefore, from the beginning, we wanted to emphasise the situation in India. And success is only from Allah. Alhamdulillah, we are getting many responses from here (

India) and from other regions, however, we need more.

*(This is a common narrative echoed by Salafi Jihadists for rallying incitement of Indian Muslims)*

**7) How much time does it usually take to oversee these translations of books or provide captions for video releases since they are generally very lengthy?**

There are no set numbers. It can be as low as 2-5 days and for the (translation of books and magazines etc.) it can take as many as 20 days. The time to publish translations varies depending on the size of the text and the translators. The increase in translations into Indian languages is a direct result of the special attention we are forced to give to the Indian situation. We want to make the vast corpus of literature about the Islamic revival project and the Jihad movement accessible to Indian Muslims. So naturally, we have to focus more on translating to and from Indian languages.

**8) What are the measures undertaken to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of the translated texts while ensuring that the meaning of the original text remains intact?**

As I mentioned it can usually take a lot of days before the translations are published on our website because of a lengthy procedure. We have a team that selects the relevant content to be translated. Then the contents are given to several coordinators, who focus on major regions/languages. The coordinators distribute the workload to the translators. After the translated texts are turned in, the coordinators hand them over. After that, they go through further checks. Then they are released by a separate team. As we mentioned our members are distributed in several regions. It is a virtual project where we do not have a particular offline location or headquarters.

**9) ITC publishes translated captions for long-winded videos and is involved in the translation of prolix pieces of literature that usually demand a longer attention span. Do you think the younger generation of jihadists will be responsive to or consume this type of content that you are publishing? What response have you gotten so far? Also, your translated literature on your website appears weekly or biweekly, so how do you plan on growing this dynamic?**

We have received a lot of responses. We have translated into close to 30 languages, and many of our readers later became contributing translators. That indicates that it is reaching people and even inspiring some of them to contribute to this initiative, though it is difficult for us to get a real measure of our reach due to strict community guidelines of other content-sharing sites and other complications. These are the works of mujahideen and irrespective of the length of the video but so far, we have been presently surprised by the reach and reaction we have received, Alhamdulillah. ITC began as a very humble project and honestly, we didn't expect such progress. Alhamdulillah, success is from Allah. Now it is much more of a duty for us to expand this work. We would like to clarify that we consider all of the youth, especially those who are actively online to be our target audience. So, we have only reached a very tiny section of the audience so far. There is much, much more to be done. God willing, we would like to i) Improve the quality and scope of our translations ii) Increase output and frequency iii) Get more intensive in our effort of producing shorter-duration videos and documentary-type videos of various mujahideen and scholars.

**10) What do you think when there are parallels drawn between Islamic State and Al Qaeda's media communication strategies? Or when there is a talk about the competition on the quality and the quantity of propaganda content produced and circulated by both organisations?**

We believe there are several fundamental differences between the media policies of Al Qaeda and the group that calls itself the Islamic State. First and foremost, Al-Qaeda sees itself as a part of the Ummah, its vanguard, and sees the Jihad as a struggle of and for the Ummah. As for the other group, which calls itself the so-called Islamic State their messaging is almost always exclusionary. They view themselves as the Ummah and excommunicate anybody who doesn't fall in line with their organisational thinking. The other group excludes the Ummah and tries to set itself on a pedestal. The other major difference, which we think stems from the previous one, is that the media policy of the group that calls itself Islamic State is sensationalist. Their media policies are focused on one goal, maximising exposure. For this, they try to shock or provoke the viewer through hyperviolence, extremely aggressive as well as provocative rhetoric and exaggeration. Rather, it's very tabloid and emotive. Ironically, this group's media posture has striking similarities to some of the most obnoxious

aspects of modernity and the excesses of western media. However, there are aspects of their admirable work. For instance, the technical quality of productions, some aspects of professionalism, and their distribution strategies have been admirable. However, for some media productions of Al Qaeda we believe, there is room for technical improvements and regularity. Alhamdulillah, we are seeing lots of improvements, especially in the material from the mujahideen in Somalia (Al-Kataib media) and the Islamic Maghrib, as well as other regions.

**11) Recently, ISIS supporters mocked the death of your leader (Ayman Al Zawahiri) and there are speculations that this might just be the right opportunity for IS to capitalise on this development to bring more disgruntled AQ sympathisers into its fold. What are the strategies for combating this narrative? Your comments on this, please.**

Some of the unfortunate characteristics of the supporters and members of the organisation calling itself the Islamic State is excessive harshness, and general obnoxiousness. These assumptions are meaningless, because they know, as well as anyone that death and martyrdom are inevitable stations in the path of Jihad. People living in glass houses shouldn't throw stones at others. As we mentioned earlier the organisation calling itself the Islamic State is known for its propensity to lie and exaggerate. There have been rumours and accusations by supporters of the so-called Islamic state that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan "leaked the location" of our Sheikh Ayman Al Zawahiri. This is nonsensical and contradicts basic intellect.

**12) How will the death of Al Qaeda's leader Ayman Al Zawahiri impact the media strategies of "The Islamic Translation Centre" or in general, the official media apparatus of Al Qaeda considering that Al Zawahiri was the main face of the organisation? Is there a fear of losing out on supporters?**

Shaykh Ayman is and will continue to be a symbol of the Global Jihad movement. Giants like Shaykh Abdullah Azzam, if true, then Shaykh's martyrdom is the cause of profound sadness as well as happiness. Sadness due to his absence and guiding knowledge among Ummah, and happiness because finally, he has received the high station of martyrdom which is sought for almost six decades. Thus if the news of the martyrdom of Shaykh Dr Ayman is true, it will not bring a stop to the Jihad movement, nor will it derail it.

**13) What is your opinion of the fitna in the Salafi jihadi movement?**

We do not consider the jihad to be a jihad of Salafis only. The Jihad movement is a movement of the Ummah. And this is in line with the thinking of the great teacher of the Mujahideen Shaykh Abdullah Azzam, the Imam Shaykh Usama bin Laden (may Allah have mercy on them) and the wise Shaykh Dr Ayman Al-Zawahiri. Of course, the Salafi current historically has been a key and often driving factor behind the Jihad movement, especially during the initial stages. But, Muslims from many different schools are part of and have sacrificed for this movement. The Islamic emirate in Afghanistan are mostly followers of Hanafi fiqh who follow the Deobandi School, but they are a part of the Jihad movement. The fitnah caused by the group that calls itself Islamic State has damaged the Jihad movement in almost every region. We believe that the majority of the responsibility for this fitnah lies with this group, and several crucial factors led them to major deviance. To begin with, they were a guerilla fighting group which gained taken (authority) over a particular region while they were engaged in fighting. At most, they could have declared an emirate, but they decided to declare

themselves as the Khilafah, demanded bayah, and unilaterally decided that all other fighting groups from all over the world should be subordinate to them and started picking fights with basically everybody. In Islamic Shariah, terms and rulings are related to reality. One cannot first declare a Khilafah and then try to build it. Their claim was empty even at the peak of their territorial expansion, as their leader could only fulfil the duties of a Muslim ruler in a limited region in Iraq and Syria. For example, they had a so-called “wilayah” in Jazair but was their leader able to implement the sharia in the Islamic land declared by them? Was their leader able to give protection to the blood, wealth and honour of the Muslims in the land where they declared Khilafah? No. The “wilayah” was and is a collection of underground cells. So the words do not match reality and this is even clearer today. Today, even their leaders, their so-called “Khalifah”, are forced to live in areas under the control groups which they consider to be apostates. What kind of Khalifah is forced to go into hiding in the lands of the apostates? They have made a mockery of this noble concept and spilt blood that is haram. The second problem was their use of takfir as a political tool. They made takfir when it was advantageous to them. With time this led to actual extremism in takfir, and now they have a methodology in takfir, which in practice is not from the path of Ahlus sunnah wal jama’ah. The third problem is the lack of scholars, which led them to depend on foolish students of knowledge who further complicated the situation with their lack of understanding. The fourth problem is their disobedience, which led them to break their bayah to Al Qaeda. And the final issue is their propensity for lying, which has been and continues to be, a hallmark of their media activities. We believe the damage caused by this group will take a long time to heal, and Allah’s help is sought. However, we also believe that with major changes in global politics, economic recession, regional conflicts and increasing polarization in the west, the jihad movement will bounce back again, and we are already seeing the signs. Because whatever it is the Mujahideen will not quit, they will not surrender, they will fight to the last drop of blood. It is a battle of will and the west simply doesn’t have what it takes to defeat such an enemy, although the west is far superior militarily.

**14) How is “ITC” different from Islamic State’s archival translation services like l’lam which offers translations of Islamic State’s publications and other media material in various languages? What are your thoughts regarding Islamic State’s rapidly evolving media infrastructure that is heavily focused on translating its literature into various languages?**

We haven’t looked deeply into l’lam’s output and operation, and have no comment about it. We do not trace how the so-called Islamic State is producing content in different languages. We have no comment about it.

**15) How does the ITC plan on expanding its role as a major media arm of Al Qaeda or other jihadist movements? Any concluding remarks?**

Our vision is to be able to work in all the major languages and to ensure high-quality translations as well as professionalism. We want to expand our works, not just in terms of translations, with time we would also like to move into other formats as well, God willing. We would move into the production of videos that advocate that amplify the works of mujahideen, God willing.

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