

# BULLETIN FROM THE SHADOWS

Monthly Analysis of Jihadist and Militant Propaganda

March 2026 | [BFTS](#)

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## The World as Epstein’s Island:

*Jihadist Propaganda in February 2026 and the Globalization of Grievance*

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In the world of jihadist propaganda, timing is never accidental — but February 2026 produced something rarer than timing alone: coherence across organizations that share almost nothing except enemies. Twelve documents released across five organizations throughout the month — spanning Arabic, Somali, Pashto, and English, originating from Yemen to Somalia to Afghanistan to what ISIS calls its virtual caliphate — do not reflect a coordinated media strategy. These groups are rivals as much as they are ideological kin. And yet, reading them together as a monthly corpus reveals something analytically striking: a convergence of themes so consistent that it functions, in effect, as a shared propaganda grammar.

In February, militant media proved itself, once again, to be a sophisticated, adaptive, and globally attentive enterprise — one that reads the international news cycle as carefully as any policy institution, and bends it toward a singular interpretive frame. That frame can be summarized in a phrase appearing, in various forms, across multiple documents: the world is under occupation. Not merely Gaza. Not merely Afghanistan. The world. And the occupier, these texts insist, has finally been unmasked.

### **The Epstein Gambit: AQAP’s Ideological Opportunism**

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The most analytically ambitious document in this month’s corpus is an Arabic-language essay published by al-Qa‘ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) under its Shāhid (Witness)

Media Service, titled *Wathā'iq Ibstīn wa-Mawqif al-Mujāhidīn* (“Epstein’s Documents and the Stance of the Mujāhidīn”).

The release of Jeffrey Epstein’s client documents by the U.S. Department of Justice becomes, in AQAP’s hands, not a scandal about one man or one network but what the group presents as definitive proof of what it terms *al-niẓām al-‘ālamī al-Ibstīnī* — the “Epsteinian world order.” This is not a fringe conspiracy theory grafted lazily onto existing propaganda. It is a carefully constructed ideological argument. AQAP reasons, in its own telling, that Epstein’s island was not a site of individual criminal deviance but a training and conditioning hub for global elites — political leaders, intelligence operatives, media executives, and financial architects — who, the statement claims, used ritualized debasement as a mechanism of mutual blackmail and ideological alignment in service of what the text terms *al-Ṣahyūṣalībīyya*, a compound neologism meaning roughly the Zionist-Crusader alliance.

The essay then performs a rhetorical move of considerable sophistication: it links the Epstein revelations to a global chain of violence against Muslim populations — the Rābi‘a massacre in Egypt, Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, Saidnaya prison in Syria, and the ongoing war in Gaza — arguing that these events are not separate instances of state violence but expressions of what it calls the same “Epsteinian training curriculum” that Western and Arab leaders absorbed on the island.

The propaganda machine absorbs a mainstream political scandal, reprocesses it through an anti-imperialist conspiratorial lens, and delivers it back as evidence of a civilizational war that only the jihadist vanguard, in AQAP’s telling, had seen coming.

*By inserting itself into the Epstein news cycle, AQAP attempts to speak not only to its established base but to a broader, globally disoriented audience watching Western institutions implode in real time.*

What makes this strategy analytically significant is the concept communication scholars call frame bridging (Snow et al. 1986): the linkage of a new, widely circulating grievance — one already generating popular outrage in Western publics — to a pre-existing ideological master frame. As Christoph Reuter (2004) and others studying militant

communication have documented (Wiktorowicz 2004), this technique has a long jihadist genealogy, but its February 2026 iteration is notably agile. By inserting itself into the Epstein news cycle, AQAP attempts to speak not only to its established base but to a broader, globally disoriented audience watching Western institutions implode in real time. The release even dismisses Trump and his evangelical supporters alongside the Democratic establishment, positioning the group beyond American partisan divisions as the only coherent counter-force. This is a propaganda operation designed to recruit from the ruins of Western liberal legitimacy — and its architects know it.

### **The Humanitarian Shield: *Al-Shabāb's* Victimhood Architecture**

Where AQAP operated in the register of grand ideological theory, *Ḥarakat al-Shabāb al-Mujāhidīn* worked in February with blunt, granular emotional documentation. Two statements — one in English, one in Somali — anchor the organization's monthly output, and both deploy the same structural logic: the enemy targets the most innocent.

The first statement, dated February 1, 2026, condemns a Turkish military airstrike on a mosque in Middle Shabelle, during which the group claims eleven named tribal elders and Islamic scholars were killed while gathering to coordinate drought relief. *Al-Shabāb* names each individual — ages, clan affiliations, roles — and appends a formal list. The document is formatted less like a press release and more like an indictment, deliberately mimicking the evidentiary conventions of human rights reporting. The second statement, published in Somali, denounces a US drone strike that, in the group's account, killed Sheikh Muḥammad Abū Usāma, the director of a drought relief committee operating across multiple provinces devastated by famine. The framing is unambiguous: American forces, the statement claims, killed a man who was feeding the poor.

Taken together, these statements construct what can be described as victimhood architecture — a systematic effort to document, publicize, and sacralize civilian suffering at the hands of foreign military actors. *Al-Shabāb* is not merely reporting operations; it is building a moral case for its own armed presence by positioning every foreign airstrike as an attack on Islamic civil society. The Quranic invocation anchoring both documents — *al-Nisā'* 4:75–76 (“*And why should you not fight in the cause of Allah?*”) — converts

documented grievance into religious obligation. Because the enemy targets those who feed the hungry and educate the faithful, not joining the armed resistance becomes, in the group's framing, the moral failure.

The February 2026 iteration carries an added edge. Both incidents involve nominal U.S. allies, Turkey and the United States itself, striking Somali civilians. The propaganda thus serves a dual function: delegitimizing the foreign interveners and the Somali government that hosts them, while *al-Shabāb* presents itself as the only actor consistent in its protection of Muslim life. For counter-messaging practitioners, the challenge this creates is not rhetorical but empirical — as long as real civilians die in real airstrikes, the propaganda's evidentiary premises are not fabricated, only its prescriptions.

## **Sovereign Theater: The Islamic Emirate Between Commemoration and Coercion**

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The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) produced the most formally statist propaganda of the month. Its February materials divide cleanly into two registers — historical legitimation and military deterrence — and the juxtaposition of the two is itself the message.

On February 15, the IEA published a commemoration of the 37th anniversary of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, casting the country's modern history as a providential pattern of resistance: three successive foreign occupations, three successive defeats. The text does not name Pakistan explicitly, but its intended audience understands the reference. The current confrontation along the Durand Line is framed as the latest iteration of a cycle Afghanistan has always resolved on its own terms. Historical memory is mobilized as deterrent narrative.

Eleven days later, that deterrence became operational. The IEA's Ministry of National Defense announced retaliatory strikes against Pakistani military positions across six eastern and southeastern provinces, claiming — though these figures are unverified by independent sources — fifty-five Pakistani soldiers killed, nineteen military posts captured, and one tank destroyed, while acknowledging eight of its own fighters killed. The operational communiqué is written entirely in the idiom of a sovereign military

institution: casualties are tabulated, objectives are declared achieved, the operation is attributed by name to a direct order from the Chief of Staff, and a closing warning is issued in measured bureaucratic language: “any violation of Afghan soil will be met with fire, steel, and vengeance,” in the statement’s own phrasing.

The pairing of these two documents illustrates the IEA’s propaganda strategy with unusual clarity. The emirate governs, remembers, retaliates, and reports. It performs statehood. Where *al-Shabāb*’s propaganda solicits moral solidarity, the IEA demands political recognition, presenting itself not as a movement challenging a state but as a state responding to aggression from a neighboring one. As Antonio Giustozzi’s (2022) work on Taliban governance has documented, this communicative posture increasingly resembles the institutional infrastructure of established governments — a development with significant implications for how international actors engage with or around the IEA diplomatically. Whether or not one accepts that self-presentation, it represents a qualitatively distinct form of militant communication, one that on the available evidence appears to be consolidating.

## **Gaza as the Gravitational Center**

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If a single issue organizes the broader field of jihadist propaganda in February 2026, it is Gaza — specifically, the effort to interpret the post-ceasefire political settlement as a new and more insidious form of occupation.

The Global Islamic Media Front’s (GIMF) *Ṣadā al-Thughūr* (Echo of the Frontiers), issue 9, dated Sha‘bān 1447, devotes its lead analytical article to what it calls the “Peace Council” for Gaza, constituted following UN Security Council Resolution 2803 in November 2025. The article dissects the Council’s membership — Trump, Rubio, Kushner, Tony Blair, Hakan Fidan, World Bank President Ajay Banga, and Apollo Global Management’s Marc Rowan — and constructs an argument that, whatever its ideological framing, draws on recognizable structural critiques of post-conflict administration: the Council represents, in the author’s analysis, economic and administrative occupation dressed as humanitarian reconstruction. Palestinian self-determination is absent from its

mandate. Foreign capital controls reconstruction contracts. An international administrator manages what remains of Gazan sovereignty.

The rhetorical conclusion moves beyond structural critique. Because the Peace Council is “occupation by another name,” the text argues, resistance is not only justified but obligatory — and the GIMF closes with what it presents as a warning to what it calls the “Trump coalition” to anticipate consequences the text describes as greater than October 7. This is a group claim, not a statement of capability. Its analytic significance lies less in operational forecasting and more in the discursive function it performs. Gaza, since late 2023, has operated as the *casus belli* (case for war) that unifies an otherwise fractured global jihadist ecosystem, providing the one issue on which AQAP, *al-Shabāb*, *Jamā‘at Nuṣrat al-Islām wa-l-Muṣl imīn* (JNIM), and ISIS’s affiliated media can speak in a shared emotional register — regardless of their deep organizational and theological divisions.

### **The Caliphate’s Doctrinal Counter-Offensive: ISIS and ISKP**

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ISIS’s *al-Nabā’* newsletters (issues 533–536), published weekly throughout February, and the Islamic State Khorasan Province’s (ISKP) *Voice of Khurāsān*, issue 38, occupy a different propaganda space from the *al-Qa‘ida*-aligned materials. Where AQAP and *al-Shabāb* engage the world as it is — responsive, grievance-anchored, externally oriented — ISIS-affiliated media primarily constructs the world as it should be and polices the boundaries of who belongs inside it.

*Voice of Khurāsān* #38 opens with an extended doctrinal treatise on the prohibition of *hijra* (migration) to non-Muslim lands, drawing on classical jurists to argue that Muslims who voluntarily settle in Western states are engaged in a form of religious self-exile bordering on apostasy. This is not an abstract theological exercise; it is a targeted message to Muslim diaspora communities, particularly in Europe and North America, framing emigration to the West as a betrayal of the *umma* and presenting the ISIS’s territory as the only legitimate *dār al-Islām* on earth. The issue’s table of contents — including articles on the Sydney attack, the Uyghur cause, U.S.–Taliban relations, and a denunciation of what ISKP calls ‘*ṭāghūt* scholars,’ including figures affiliated with the IEA — makes clear that this month’s output is simultaneously anti-Taliban, anti-Western, and

globally aspirational. ISIS and the IEA are engaged in an active, ongoing contest for doctrinal authority over the global Salafi-jihadist field, and ISKP's insistence that only ISIS constitutes legitimate governance is a direct theological challenge to IEA's governing claims.

The *al-Nabā'* newsletters serve a distinct organizational function: maintaining the appearance of territorial and operational continuity across the caliphate's *wilāyāt* network. Weekly reporting on operations in Iraq, Syria, West Africa, and the Sinai sustains the communicative performance of an ongoing, globally distributed enterprise rather than a defeated territorial project. This persistence — the act of publishing, counting, claiming — is itself the propaganda. The Islamic State demonstrates that it still fights, still publishes, still counts. In a media environment where silence signals defeat, *al-Nabā'*'s very regularity is a strategic asset.

### **The Overarching Pattern: Five Organizations, One Grammar**

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Stepping back from the individual documents, the February 2026 corpus reveals four structural patterns that define the current moment in jihadist propaganda.

**First, the opportunistic absorption of Western political crises.** AQAP's Epstein essay and GIMF's Gaza–Peace Council analysis both demonstrate an organizational capacity to read mainstream political developments and rapidly integrate them into existing ideological frameworks. This is not new in kind, but the speed and sophistication have measurably accelerated. Militant media organizations increasingly function as counter-interpretive institutions — shadow think tanks offering their audiences an alternative explanatory architecture for events they are already following in real time.

**Second, the systematic weaponization of humanitarian suffering.** Across *al-Shabāb*, GIMF, and the IEA materials, civilian victimhood functions as the primary evidentiary basis for armed mobilization. The protection of Muslim civilian life is not merely a sympathetic theme; it is the structural anchor of legitimation. This places counter-narrative practitioners in a genuinely difficult position: as long as real civilians die in real airstrikes, the propaganda's factual premises are not fabricated — only its prescriptions.

**Third, intensifying intra-jihadist competition for doctrinal authority.** The IEA and ISKP materials are best understood not only in relation to their external enemies but in relation to each other. ISKP's insistence that only ISIS constitutes legitimate *dār al-Islām* directly challenges IEA's governing authority; the IEA's statist register is, in part, a counter-move against ISIS's theological delegitimation. The *al-Qa'ida*/ISIS rivalry, far from having resolved itself, continues to generate productive ideological competition that drives each organization toward more elaborate forms of self-legitimation — a dynamic that likely sustains, rather than diminishes, each group's propaganda output.

**Fourth, the Ramaḍān media surge.** Multiple documents in this corpus are calibrated to the onset of *Ramaḍān* 1447/Sha'ḥbān 1447, reflecting the well-documented pattern of elevated militant media production during this period. *Ramaḍān* functions as both a communications calendar — a moment when Muslim audiences are more attentive to religious content — and a mobilization threshold, when calls to action carry heightened ritual weight.

### **Conclusion: Reading the Corpus as a Field**

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Analyzed in isolation, each of these documents is a piece of propaganda from a designated terrorist organization. Analyzed together — as a monthly corpus produced within a shared discursive field — they reveal something more structurally significant: a distributed but ideologically coherent counter-public sphere that processes the same international events occupying mainstream media and redelivers them, at speed, as evidence of a single, ongoing, divinely framed civilizational war.

The February corpus is particularly notable for its engagement with contemporary political events — the Epstein documents, the Gaza Peace Council, the Afghan–Pakistani border confrontation, the Somalia famine — rather than reliance on archival grievances alone. This responsiveness is a measure of organizational vitality. These are not institutions in decline producing rearguard ideological nostalgia. They are adaptive communicative actors, reading the same world their audiences live in and offering — with formidable rhetorical skill — a totalizing explanation for why it is broken, who broke it, and what must be done.

*That explanation is always the same. But the raw material it processes is always new.*

For analysts and policymakers, that combination — ideological constancy and tactical adaptability — is precisely what makes these organizations difficult to counter and dangerous to underestimate.

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*Analysis based on primary source materials archived for February 2026 (Sha 'bān–Ramaḍān 1447 AH). All translations and transliterations are the author's own. IJMES transliteration system used throughout. Documents are analyzed for academic and policy research purposes under the frameworks of critical terrorism studies and political communication scholarship. All casualty figures and operational claims are group claims; none have been independently verified unless otherwise noted.*



## ABOUT THIS BULLETIN

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***Bulletin from the Shadows*** (BFTS) is a regular analytical newsletter dedicated to monitoring and interpreting the official propaganda, ideological statements, and strategic communications of jihadist and militant organizations. Each issue draws exclusively on primary-source materials — including official publications, audio and video releases, and digital periodicals — released by groups such as ISIS, *al-Qā'ida* and its affiliates, and other armed non-state actors as relevant.

The bulletin applies systematic narrative coding, discourse analysis, and cross-group comparison to track shifts in framing, enemy targeting hierarchies, recruitment appeals, and doctrinal positioning. Its longitudinal design enables month-on-month comparisons that reveal directional trends invisible in any single release.

The bulletin is produced for policymakers, journalists, researchers, and security and counterterrorism practitioners. It is published regularly [here](#).

**Method note:** *Primary-source analysis only. Graphic content summarized, not reproduced. No direct links to extremist media. All casualty figures and operational claims are group claims; independent verification status is noted throughout.*

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