

Al-Qaida Calls for Islamic Militant Coalition Against Russia and the West

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Osama bin Laden (L) sits with Al Qaeda's top strategist and second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahri in this 2001 file photo.

The leader of terrorist group al-Qaida, Ayman al-Zawahri, called for like-minded extremist groups operating in Syria and Iraq to band together against Russia, the United States and their allies, news agency Reuters reported Sunday.

“The Americans, Russians, Iranians, Alawites and Hezbollah are coordinating their war against us — are we not capable of stopping fighting amongst ourselves so we can direct all our efforts against them,” Zawahri said in an audio recording published on the Internet on Sunday.

Russia and the United States are at the helms of two different international coalitions engaged in air strikes on targets fighting in Syria's 4 1/2-year-old civil war. Moscow began its operation on Sept. 30, and Zawahri's reference to Russia suggests his call was recorded in the last month.

“My mujahideen brothers in all places and of all groups ... we face aggression from America, Europe, and Russia ... so it's up to us to stand together as one from East Turkestan to Morocco,” Zawahri said, Reuters reported.

Moscow intervened on behalf of Syrian President Bashar Assad, bombing groups opposed to the Syrian regime. Though Russia claims to be hitting Islamic State targets, Western officials insist that Russia is bombing elements of the so-called moderate Syrian opposition.

Amid this confusion, al-Qaida has made attempts to present itself as the legitimate leader of extremist forces operating in Syria. In September, Zawahri said the Islamic State was illegitimate, and called for its supporters to join al-Qaida in fighting the Western coalition.

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