

# The Power of Truth?

Questions for Ayman al-Zawahiri



  
 "أسئلة المفتوح"   
 مع **أيمن الظواهري**   
 إستقبال لأسئلة لمدة شهر   
 من ١٢ / ٦ / ٢٠٠٧ م إلى ٨ / ٦ / ٢٠٠٨ م

يسر المشاهير بتصديق مع مركز الفجر أن تعلن عن تنظيم لقاء مفتوح مع الشيخ / أيمن الظواهري ، يجيب فيه على الأسئلة الموجهة إليه من الأفراد أو الهيئات وكافة وسائل الإعلام. وعلى من يرغب بوجوبه سؤال إليه أن يرسل به لأحد المواقع التي ستخصص لجمع الأسئلة في فترة شهر من بداية نشر هذا الإعلان وأن يحرص على أن يكون السؤال مختصراً ومركزاً كما نطلب من الهيئات ووسائل الإعلام أن تذكر اسمها في نهاية السؤال ، ونرجوا من الأخوة المشرفين على جمع الأسئلة أن يملوها بحرفها دون تغيير أو تحريف سواء كان موافقاً أو المخالف وستحرص المشاهير على إجابة أسئلة أيمن الظواهري على هذه الأسئلة التي



# THE POWER OF TRUTH: \*

## QUESTIONS FOR AYMAN AL-ZAWAHIRI

JARRET BRACHMAN, BRIAN FISHMAN, JOSEPH FELTER \*\*

21 APRIL 2008

*The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the official position of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of Defense and the U.S. Government.*

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\* On 19 September 2007, *As-Sahab Media*, Al-Qa'ida's official media outlet, released one of its most sophisticated video productions entitled, "The Power of Truth." Over the course of its one hour and twenty minute duration, the film wove together a variety of primary source clips featuring Western counterterrorism analysts, observers and policymakers discussing the resilience of al-Qa'ida and America's troubles in Iraq. The video illustrated one of the media strategies al-Qa'ida believes is most effective—condemning one's opponents by using their own words against them. The CTC has consistently tried to use al-Qa'ida's writing and statements (and was credited for doing by Zawahiri himself in his latest book, *Exoneration*) to understand the movement, its strengths, and weaknesses. We decided to use al-Qa'ida's title, "The Power of Truth" because this paper, in essence, turns the mirror back on Zawahiri, showing the selectivity and discrepancies in Part I of his response.

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# The Power of Truth:

## QUESTIONS FOR AYMAN AL-ZAWAHIRI (PART I)

JARRET BRACHMAN, BRIAN FISHMAN AND JOSEPH FELTER

On 16 December 2007, Ayman al-Zawahiri invited journalists and Jihadist enthusiasts to ask him questions via the primary Jihadist web forums. Zawahiri promised to personally answer some of those questions in a subsequent statement. On 2 April 2008, *As-Sahab Media* released the first part of Zawahiri's response in the form of a one hour, forty-three minute audio statement, which was accompanied by Arabic and English transcripts.

Zawahiri used the opportunity to publicly address topics that have been dogging him for years. He answered some questions directly, like whether al-Qa'ida's willingness to kill innocent Muslims in the course of their operations is apostasy. He sidestepped other questions, including more politicized ones about al-Qa'ida's increasing difficulties in Iraq and, in particular, al-Qa'ida's official position toward Iran.

As part of the CTC's ongoing effort to make relevant information about al-Qa'ida and its associated movements available to more audiences, we are pleased to include 1,888 of the original questions (in full-text Arabic and translated English) posed to Zawahiri on the two most exclusive Al-Qa'ida internet forums. In our analysis of those questions, we found a major disconnect between what was actually asked to Zawahiri versus the topics that he chose to answer. For instance, 19% of the questions dealt with the status and internal dynamics of Al-Qa'ida's High-Command, a topic that Zawahiri entirely ignored. On the other hand, Zawahiri dedicated significant time to criticizing a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, an issue that appeared in only 1% of the questions posed to him.

Beyond the obvious selection bias of the questions that Zawahiri chose to answer, we believe that he made one major strategic mistake in his 2 April statement, one that bolsters suggestions that Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, "Emir" of al-Qa'ida's Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), is a fabricated persona. While trying to mitigate the damage caused by a former colleague's recent rejection of al-Qa'ida-style Jihad, Zawahiri mentioned that his group, *Egyptian Islamic Jihad* (EIJ), had created a fake identity in the early 1990s a way to publicly personify their senior leadership committee and obfuscate the EIJ Emir's true identity. Although disclosing this important piece of Jihadist tradecraft information may help him delegitimize his former colleague, we believe that it lends further credence to arguments that Abu Umar al-Baghdadi is also a symbolic persona.

The following analysis of Zawahiri's Part I response is broken into three sections. The first evaluates the most important themes that Zawahiri addressed on 2 April, namely HAMAS, the killing of innocents, Yusuf al-Qaradawi and the Muslim Brotherhood, the Lebanese Jihadist group *Fatah al-Islam*, and Zawahiri's dispute with Sayyid Imam Sharif, the former Emir of Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

The second section explores the issues that Zawahiri mentioned but failed to actually answer, namely al-Qa'ida's relationship with other insurgents in Iraq and al-Qa'ida's position toward Iran. Because Part II of his responses is forthcoming, we can only assume that Zawahiri is saving more complete answers on those questions.

In the third section, we are pleased to offer our analysis of 1,888 questions that were posed to Zawahiri on the password-protected *Al-Ekhllass* and *Al-Hesbah* websites. As discussed above, the CTC acquired these questions as part of its ongoing effort to identify and release relevant information for scholars, researchers and the global public that is contained in U.S. government databases. Additionally, we have made these questions available, in their entirety, on the CTC website.<sup>1</sup>

## **1. QUESTIONS ZAWAHIRI ANSWERED**

Zawahiri divided the questions that he planned to answer in Part I into three broad categories: the killing of innocents, Iran, and Egypt. In reality, however, he touched on a far broader set of issues. We have selected five of the themes that we deem to be most important from Part I to further explore: HAMAS, the killing of innocents, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Fatah al-Islam*, and Sayyid Imam al-Sharif.

### ***HAMAS***

Over the past year, Zawahiri and other senior al-Qa'ida figures have been waging a vigorous propaganda campaign against the Palestinian organization HAMAS. Although Jihadists unanimously denounce Israel they continue to disagree over whether HAMAS should be considered a legitimate Islamic movement. For Zawahiri, HAMAS' embrace of nationalism, democracy, and its legacy in the Muslim Brotherhood—arguably the three things al-Qa'ida hates most—delegitimizes the group.

Zawahiri has walked a fine line over the past year, alternately criticizing HAMAS' participation in negotiations and elections, and supporting its military

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<sup>1</sup> The Combating Terrorism Center's website is: <http://www.ctc.usma.edu>

operations against Israel.<sup>2</sup> Zawahiri's ambivalence has left many in the Jihadist movement confused about his real intentions: Zawahiri was asked repeatedly to clarify his position toward HAMAS as well as why al-Qa'ida has yet to attack Israel. Zawahiri has shown a consistent willingness to capitalize on the obvious emotional resonance that issues related to the Palestinian cause evokes among Arabs and Muslims. Al-Qa'ida's High-Command has, therefore, been reticent to condemn an organization that many Arabs and Muslims support because it is seen as Israel's primary antagonist.

In his 2 April response, Zawahiri situated his previous comments in a broader strategic context, explaining that he was critical of HAMAS' political leadership for abandoning purely violent Jihad but had always supported HAMAS' militant operators – the Izz al-din al-Qassam Brigades. Zawahiri's bifurcation of HAMAS is part of a concerted strategy to siphon off supporters from HAMAS' street-level operators.

Part of this strategy may have also included the 14 February 2008 call by Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, the supposed emir of al-Qa'ida's Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), for the Qassam Brigades to rebel against HAMAS' leadership and attack Israel.<sup>3</sup> The Qassam Brigades quickly rejected the idea, explaining derisively to al-Baghdadi that "your intelligence has betrayed you."<sup>4</sup> HAMAS continues to view al-Qa'ida as a potential threat within the Palestinian territories. Even al-Qa'ida's presence in the Territories is potentially damaging. HAMAS enjoys considerable political support in the Arab world that would be put at risk if its fight against Israel becomes conflated with al-Qa'ida's broader struggle to revolutionize the Muslim world.

The Jihadist community's backlash against Zawahiri on the HAMAS and the Palestinian issues illustrates how poorly al-Qa'ida deals with nuanced problems. Zawahiri probably helped himself on the matter by clearly explaining his position. Nonetheless, Zawahiri's answer will be unsatisfactory for Jihadists on both sides of the issue, those that want to see al-Qa'ida push HAMAS to challenge Israel more violently and those that see HAMAS as the best defender of Palestinians. Al-Qa'ida does not want to provoke an open confrontation with HAMAS, but Zawahiri's increasingly heated rhetoric suggests an al-Qa'ida strike on Israel is increasingly likely, regardless of the fallout with HAMAS.

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<sup>2</sup> Al-Zawahiri, Ayman. *Interview with As-Sahab*. 5 May 2007; Moderation: Ayman al-Zawahiri. *Statement* 10 July 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Baghdadi, Abu Umar *Audio Statement* 14 February 2008

<sup>4</sup> First Gaza Brigade *Statement* 19 February 2008

### *Killing of Innocents*

Al-Qa'ida is often accused of unjustifiably killing fellow Muslims, many of whom have nothing to do with supporting Arab regimes or local security forces. Historically, al-Qa'ida has been at its theologically weakest and ideologically most defensive in trying to justify the killing of innocents. Zawahiri's 9 July 2005 letter to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, for instance, warned of the negative impact attacks on Muslim civilians would have in the Middle East. Zawahiri's warnings proved prescient months later when Zarqawi attacked three hotels in Amman, Jordan.<sup>5</sup> Popular support for al-Qa'ida in Jordan plummeted from 56% in 2003 to 20% in 2007.<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly, many questioners asked Zawahiri to clarify his position on attacks that kill Muslims. Zawahiri was intractable on the issue:

...We haven't killed the innocents; not in Baghdad, nor in Morocco, nor in Algeria, nor anywhere else. And if there is any innocent who was killed in the Mujahideen's operations, then it was either an unintentional error, or out of necessity as in cases of *al-Tatarrus*."

'*Mas'alat al-Tatarrus* (the issue of non-Muslims taking Muslims as human shields) offers the Jihadist movement its most reliable religious safeguard from charges of apostasy for killing Muslims. Zawahiri employs the *al-Tatarrus* defense, but offers nothing new to the debate, instead referring to a compendium on the topic assembled by Abu Yahya al-Libi. In that book, Abu Yahya defines *al-Tatarrus* as "the instrument of war known as the human shield as a way of protecting someone from the attacks of an enemy." Abu Yahya explains that there are two types of *al-Tatarrus*, the first being when a non-Muslim enemy forces innocents (often times Muslim prisoners) as a shield in order to deter an attack. The second type is when Muslims willingly choose to conduct business or occupy a non-Muslim venue.<sup>7</sup>

In the first case, there is no doubt that Muslims being forcibly held by a non-Muslim enemy are being used as a human shield, and therefore can be killed without religious punishment so long as the attack occurs within the context of justified religious warfare. The second case, Abu Yahya admits, is more tenuous.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri "Letter to Zarqawi." July 9, 2005. Released by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence October 12, 2005 <http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/CTC-Zawahiri-Letter-10-05.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Report. 2007. Pew Global Attitudes Project. Washington, DC: Pew Foundation. Available from: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/257.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Qa'id, Hassan Muhammad [Abu Yahya al-Libi]. *Tatarrus in Modern Jihad*. Available: <http://www.almaqdes.net/r?i=3825>

<sup>8</sup> Abu Yahya cites several Hadith in order to justify his position on *al-Tatarrus*. Abu Yahya cites Abu Hanifa who said that it is acceptable to attack the forts of the non-Muslim enemy, even if there are Muslim prisoners and Muslim children present; it is acceptable to burn those forts. He also cites Imam Qassani al-Hanafi who said that it is permissible to attack non-Muslim enemies

There is an extensive body of existing Jihadist literature on the application of the *al-Tatarrus* concept in contemporary Jihadist warfare written by key ideologues such as Abdullah Azzam and Hamoud bin Uqla al-Shuaybi. Rather than referring to these figures, Zawahiri relies on a text by Abu Yahya al-Libi, a noted scholar, but not nearly as revered as the others who have published on the topic. The chief benefit of referencing al-Libi (which Zawahiri does twice) seems to be to squash rumors that he and al-Libi have been feuding over the future of al-Qa'ida.

Zawahiri's second method of deflecting criticism is to reject the premise: "in fact, we fight those who kill innocents. Those who kill innocents are the Americans, the Jews, the Russians and the French and their agents." Perhaps unsurprisingly, Zawahiri did not offer a detailed analysis of attacks to explain or justify this assertion, though he did mention recent attacks by al-Qa'ida in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQLIM) to illustrate his point. Zawahiri defended a recent AQLIM operation against the United Nations Headquarters in Algiers, arguing that it was, "not against children's schools or women's hospitals." He went on to defend an operation against an Algerian coast guard facility by saying that it was "against a naval base, and not on a children's school."

Zawahiri is intimately aware of the negative impact that killing Muslim children can have on a Jihadist movement. In his memoirs, *Knights Under the Banner of the Prophet*, for instance, he described a failed attempt to kill the Egyptian prime minister Atef Sidqi in 1993. EIJ detonated a bomb as Sidqi's motorcade passed; the bomb not only missed its target but inadvertently killed a twelve-year old girl named Shayma. The negative publicity from the Shayma incident severely weakened Jihadist movements in Egypt for years.

### *Yusuf al-Qaradawi*

Hard-line Jihadist organizations like al-Qa'ida both fear and despise the Islamist political movement called the Muslim Brotherhood, in large part because the Brotherhood effectively garners support from the same constituencies that Jihadists are desperate to court. Because the Muslim Brotherhood and Jihadists share a similar ideological lineage, Jihadists tend to focus their criticism on the Brotherhood's willingness to participate in secular politics as a vehicle for attacking their Islamic credentials.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi is one of the most important symbols of the Muslim Brotherhood today. Zawahiri's disdain for Qaradawi is so strong that he says he

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with bow and arrows even if you know that there are Muslim prisoners or Muslim merchants present, even if Muslim children are present, it is permissible to attack.



“wished” to be asked a question about the Egyptian legal scholar. But when compared to critiques that have already been published by more formally trained Jihadist scholars, including Nasir bin Hamad Al-Fahd, ‘Abdul-‘Aziz bin Salih Al-Jarbu, and Abu Basir At-Tartusi, Zawahiri’s falls noticeably flat.<sup>9</sup>

Zawahiri chooses not to cite any of these senior thinkers, relying instead on his own analysis, which represents either a profound lack of awareness, an inflated sense of his own scholarly importance, or a concerted effort to avoid technical religious arguments.

Zawahiri makes five points in his effort to damage Qaradawi. First, he claims that Qaradawi, “believes the senior criminals and accuses the Mujahideen of lying,” referring to the Muslim Brotherhood’s collaboration with Arab governments. Damning the Muslim Brotherhood for their willingness to engage in politics and interact with ruling Arab regimes is rote for any Jihadist critique of the group.

Second, Zawahiri accuses Qaradawi of disregarding “the difference between the charter of al-Qa’ida Organization in the countries of the Islamic Maghreb and the Algerian secular constitution.” Zawahiri is likely referring to an open letter Qaradawi recently sent to the Algerian president, Abdelaziz Boutefilka, in which he asks members of AQLIM to repent and emulate the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. On this point, Zawahiri cleverly uses the AQLIM to represent the broader Jihadist Movement and uses Qaradawi to represent the broader Muslim Brotherhood, which he believes has been co-opted by Arab regimes. By attacking Qaradawi for opposing AQLIM’s attacks, Zawahiri indicts the entire Muslim Brotherhood for its unwillingness to embrace Jihadist-style violence. Zawahiri’s dividing line is clear without needing to be articulated: those who support the AQLIM are true Muslims. Those who stand against it are not.

Third, Zawahiri criticizes Qaradawi for his willingness to indefinitely delay fighting (*terayuth*) against secular regimes that he knows to be unjust. Zawahiri highlights several specific injustices that he feels effectively demonstrate the

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<sup>9</sup> Some of the more hard-hitting critiques of Qaradawi, none of which were cited by Zawahiri, include: *Iskat Kalb Al-Awi* (Silencing the Hounding Dog) by Shaykh Muqbil Ibn Hadi Al-Wadi’I; *Khulasat Ba’dh Afkar Al-Qaradawi* (The Summary of Some of the Concepts of Al-Qaradawi) by Nasir bin Hamad Al-Fahd; *Al-I’lam Bi Naqd Kitab;Al-Haqq Ad-Damigh Li’d-Da’awi Fi Dahdh Maza’im Al-Qaradawi* (The Irrefutable Truth For The Allegations In Nullifying The Claims Of Al-Qaradawi) by ‘Abdul-Karim bin Salih Al-Humayd; *Saqiyatun Latamat Bahran* (A Canal That Fought A Sea) by Shaykh ‘Abdul-‘Aziz bin Salih Al-Jarbu; *Mawqif Al-Qaradawi Min An-Nasarah* (The Position of Al-Qaradawi Towards the Christians) by Muhammad bin Muhammad Al-Fazazi; *A-Mawqif Ash-Shar’i Min Al-Qaradawi* (The Position of the Shari’ah Upon Al-Qaradawi) by Shaykh AbuBasir Mustafa Halimah At-Tartusi; and *Refutation of a Fatwa Issued Concerning the Permissibility of Muslims Participating in Military Operation Against Muslims in Afghanistan* by Shaykh Salah As-Sawi;



stark contrast between Qaradawi's decision to postpone fighting and the Jihadist movement, which advocates violence immediately. They include Arab peace accords and trade with Israel, Israel's blockade of Palestinians in Gaza, Arab military courts for trying Muslims, Arab hosting of U.S. military forces, particularly in Egypt, the prevalence of Western "vulgar media" and the secular constitution and laws of Arab countries.

Fourth, Zawahiri attacks Qaradawi for co-authoring a 1994 *fatwa* arguing that Muslims fighting in non-Muslim armies against other Muslims can remain true to their faith. Again, Zawahiri virtually ignores a deep body of Jihadist scholarship conducted on this topic, including a particularly exhaustive treatment on the topic by Shaikh Salah As-Saawi.<sup>10</sup>

Zawahiri's fifth point is his weakest. He claims that Qaradawi does not adequately defend the Palestinian cause and offers an undocumented quotation allegedly spoken by Qaradawi at an unknown press conference as proof.

Zawahiri's critique of Qaradawi is far less sophisticated than previous Jihadist statements. Abu Basir al-Tartusi's analysis of Qaradawi, for instance, assaults him on a number of issues that are more damaging to Qaradawi's religious credibility than what Zawahiri offered.<sup>11</sup> For example, Tartusi confronts Qaradawi on his positive outlook toward the Shia, his alleged public mocking of God in a statement that the revered Saudi Shaikh Ibn 'Uthaymin declared an act of "apostasy," Qaradawi's granting of permission to women to sing in theaters accompanied by music as well as his permission of commercial transactions.

Zawahiri's attack on Qaradawi is more symbolic than substantive. Zawahiri's critique ignores an entire body of Jihadist literature on the topic and offers nothing new. Nonetheless, Zawahiri's criticism is important. His aversion to detailed religious arguments suggests he may be trying to focus his critique so that it is easy for casual observers to understand. He may also want to avoid engaging in a religious argument with prominent scholars who can exploit his weakness in this sphere and refute his religious case more robustly.

### ***Fatah al-Islam***

A number of questioners pushed Zawahiri to clarify his position on *Fatah al-Islam*, a Lebanese Jihadist group that last summer clashed with the Lebanese Army in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp. Some even complained that Zawahiri should have given *Fatah al-Islam* more support during its fight against the Lebanese Army.

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<sup>10</sup> Sheikh Salah As-Saawi. "Refutation of a Fatwa Issued Concerning the Permissibility of Muslims Participating in Military Operations Against Muslims in Afghanistan." November 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Tartusi, Abu Basir. *The Sharee Stance On Qardawi*. [www.en.altartosi.com/](http://www.en.altartosi.com/)

In his 2 April response, Zawahiri rejected this suggestion, saying that he did not openly support *Fatah al-Islam* because the group was busy rejecting accusations that it was part of al-Qa'ida; Zawahiri did not want to confuse their media strategy. That danger having passed, Zawahiri made clear his support, declaring, "that the brothers in Fatah al-Islam are heroes of Islam, and we know nothing but every good thing about them..."<sup>12</sup>

Zawahiri's public backing for *Fatah al-Islam* matters because of long-standing rumors that Lebanon's Jihadist groups have ties to Syrian intelligence and even to Lebanon's famous Hariri political family.<sup>13</sup> Jihadist questioners were likely concerned about such rumors, largely due to the fact that Zawahiri has ignored the group during his intermittent statements about Lebanon over the past several years.

Zawahiri last discussed Lebanon in his public rhetoric in January and February 2007, when he twice condemned the presence of United Nations Peacekeeping forces in Southern Lebanon.<sup>14</sup> (The calls seemed to generate a response in the form of a roadside bomb that killed three Spanish peacekeepers.<sup>15</sup>) Southern Lebanon is home to *Asbat al-Ansar* and *Jund al-Sham*, two Lebanese Jihadist groups that notably avoided helping *Fatah al-Islam* during its fight against the Lebanese Army.

Southern Lebanon is also home to *Hizballah*, a Shia organization with strong links to Iran. Al-Qa'ida's followers, in particular the late Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, strongly condemn *Hizballah*. They accuse the group of not confronting Israel directly enough and accepting international troops in Lebanon.<sup>16</sup> Such polemics reflect a broad struggle between terrorist groups in the Middle East over who can claim to be the most prominent opponent of Israel. By supporting *Fatah al-Islam*, Zawahiri hopes to improve al-Qa'ida's leverage inside Lebanon, as well as hint that al-Qa'ida has an operational presence near Israel's northern border.

### *Sayyid Imam al-Sharif*

Al-Qa'ida's campaign against Sayyid Imam Sharif's new book, *Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt, the World*, escalated in the past month with the publication of Zawahiri's book, *The Exoneration: A Letter Exonerating the Ummah of Pen and Sword from Unjust Allegations of Feebleness and Weakness*,<sup>17</sup> and the Part I of his press conference response. Sayyid Imam's book, *Rationalizing*, has caused al-Qa'ida

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<sup>12</sup> Al-Zawahiri, Ayman *Response to Questions* 2 April 2008

<sup>13</sup> Itani, Fidaa "Radical Islamists Exploit a Fragmented Country" *Le Monde Diplomatique* February 2008

<sup>14</sup> Al-Zawahiri, Ayman *Statements*: 22 January 2007; al-Zawahiri, Ayman *Statement*, 14 February 2007

<sup>15</sup> "Lebanon Blast Kills UN Soldiers" *BBC World News*. 24 June 2007

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/6235224.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6235224.stm)

<sup>16</sup> Al-Zarqawi, Abu Mus'ab *Has the Story of the Rejectionists Reached Thee?* Audio Statement 1 June 2006

tremendous grief because of its critique of Jihadist ideology and because of the significance of its author, the former Emir of Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Among the most brilliant and rabid Jihadist thinkers of the past half-century, Sayyid Imam's new book marks an ideological about-face and reopens a fourteen-year old wound between him and Ayman al-Zawahiri.

The questions submitted to Zawahiri regarding Sayyid Imam focused on lingering rumors that Zawahiri had made unauthorized edits to one of Sayyid Imam's previous books in 1994, the nature of Sayyid Imam's personal falling out with Zawahiri, and his thoughts on Sayyid Imam's recent revisions.

In a creative maneuver, Zawahiri uses his response to rewrite history in a way that allows him to both marginalize Sayyid Imam Sharif's Jihadist credentials (therefore, decreasing the consequence of his recent revisions) on the one hand, while quietly appropriating Sayyid Imam's corpus of writings (which serves to bolster Zawahiri's own intellectual standing) on the other. Zawahiri's argument is deceptively simple: Sayyid Imam Sharif is not the same person as "Abd al-Qadir ibn Abd al-Aziz," the penname that has been historically attributed to Sayyid Imam and under which the books credited to him were written. Zawahiri clarifies:

"Abd al-Qadir bin 'Abd al-'Aziz," which is a symbolic name of al-Jihad Group and not the real name of the author of the "document of guidance," [Sayyid Imam Sharif] to the extent that many of the brothers imagined that it was a symbolic name of mine! (Zawahiri 2008, Part I: 15-16)

In short, Zawahiri's assertion is that the pseudonym, "Abd al-Qadir ibn Abd al-Aziz" was a symbolic personification of the entire *Al-Jihad* Group, not the individual Sayyid Imam Sharif. Since Zawahiri was a leading member of *Al-Jihad*, he has managed to insert himself into the Abd al-Qadir ibn Abd al-Aziz story. By doing so, Zawahiri hopes to decouple Sayyid Imam Sharif from his early writings and hint that he himself deserves at least some credit for that body of work.

In an 18 November 2007 interview, the hard-line Egyptian dissident, Hani al-Siba'i, disputed this idea; he argued that the pseudonym, "Abd al-Qadir Ibn Abd al-Aziz," was in fact developed by *Al-Jihad* to mask the real identity of the *Al-Jihad* Emir, Sayyid Imam Sharif. Contrary to Zawahiri's assertion that "Abd al-Qadir ibn Abd al-Aziz" was a personification of the entire group, al-Siba'i says it

was a method to disguise Sayyid Imam's true identity both from the public as well as from the group's own members.<sup>17</sup>

Other sources report that Zawahiri was intensely paranoid and security conscious at the time. In the book, *Ayman al-Zawahiri as I Knew Him*, Zawahiri's Egyptian contemporary Muntasir al-Zayyat detailed Zawahiri's preoccupation with compartmentalizing information, explaining that:

Rarely [did] a member, or even a leading figure [in Zawahiri's al-Jihad], ask questions about a matter that [did] not concern him. Inquisitive members who [could not] overcome their curiosity [were] placed under constant surveillance by the group's leaders out of fear that they might learn some information that would eventually harm the group.<sup>18</sup>

Since Sayyid Imam was the *Al-Jihad's* primary Sharia scholar, he likely had a tremendous impact on most of the group's statements. At the time, the "Abd al-Qadir Ibn Abd al-Aziz" pseudonym would have applied primarily to Sayyid Imam's work whether the name was his alone or referred to the entire group. Today, the confusion over who (or what) the "Abd al-Qadir Ibn Abd al-Aziz" name refers to offers Zawahiri just enough ambiguity in order to rewrite history believably—and distance a present-day enemy from a valuable body of literature.

By contending that "Abd al-Qadir abd al-Aziz" is an *Al-Jihad* pseudonym, Zawahiri hopes to co-opt all of the work published under that name. This decoupling of Sayyid Imam from his corpus of writings severely denigrates Sayyid Imam's Jihadist credentials, which serves to minimize the importance of his recent recantation. Zawahiri may also hope that he can seamlessly expropriate Sayyid Imam's intellectual legacy by way of this "Abd al-Qadir Abd al-Aziz" maneuver.

## **2. QUESTIONS ZAWAHIRI SIDESTEPED**

### ***Iraq and the Islamic State***

Many of the questions posed to Zawahiri focused on al-Qa'ida's affiliate in Iraq, known as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). Posters were concerned about the anti-al-Qa'ida revolt by Sunni insurgent groups, the Jihadist group *Ansar al-Islam's* unwillingness to join al-Qa'ida's ISI, the theological and strategic wisdom of declaring the ISI, and the leadership of al-Qa'ida's Iraqi affiliate since Abu

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<sup>17</sup> Al-Khatib, Ahmed. "It is a Long Trip for Dr. Fadl from Beni Suwaif to Peshawar to Sudan to Yemen and the end in Turah." *Al-Masry al-Yawm*. 11 November 2007

<sup>18</sup> Al-Zayat, Muntassir. "Excerpts from *Ayman Al-Zawahiri as I Knew Him*." *Al-Hayah*. 16 January 2002. p 15.

Mus'ab al-Zarqawi was killed. Zawahiri did not address any of these issues substantively.

The Islamic State of Iraq created uproar in the Jihadist community as soon as it was established in October 2006. Many Jihadist scholars, including Hamid al-Ali and Abu Basir al-Tartusi, criticized the ISI on both strategic and religious grounds.<sup>19</sup> Jihadist critics such as al-Ali argue that the ISI cannot control territory, is unable to implement Sharia, and declared Abu Umar al-Baghdadi its leader – a figure with no public history of scholarship or known combat experience. Despite such biting criticism, Zawahiri does not want to provoke a full-fledged religious argument with experienced scholars. In his 2 April response, Zawahiri was more interested in mending fences with al-Ali and al-Tartusi than defending the ISI:

“Shaykh Hamid al-Ali and Shaykh Abu Baseer al-Taratoosi receive all our respect and appreciation... As for their opposition to the Islamic State of Iraq, no human is infallible, and we strive to solve any differences which crop up through scientific and applied research...And I don't agree with detracting from their worth or the worth of any truthful scholar because of a mere difference with him in an opinion or statement.” (*Zawahiri, 2008: 41*)

Posters' asked Zawahiri numerous questions about Iraqi insurgent groups that have turned on al-Qa'ida. The *Islamic Army of Iraq* (IAI), which fought the ISI in a series of bloody battles last summer, attracted special derision.<sup>20</sup> Jihadist focus on the IAI is less a result of its role in Iraq than in its willingness to fight the ISI in the propaganda war, not just on Iraq's streets. The IAI fought the ISI (and lost) for control of the al-Boraq website last spring and their spokesman Ibrahim Shammari appears frequently on Arab satellite channels. Over the past year, nationalist insurgent organizations have coalesced into large blocs, including the *Political Council for Iraqi Resistance*, which serve to catalyze their message for media consumption.<sup>21</sup> The rise of such blocs has directly challenged the ISI's political program.

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<sup>19</sup> See [www.h-alali.net](http://www.h-alali.net). Al-Ali, Hamid. 2007. Fatwa on the Islamic State of Iraq Kuwait: [www.h-alali.net](http://www.h-alali.net). Available at: [http://www.h-alali.net/f\\_open.php?id=1a55240a-3422-102a-9c4c-0010dc91cf69](http://www.h-alali.net/f_open.php?id=1a55240a-3422-102a-9c4c-0010dc91cf69)

<sup>20</sup> For more on the ISI's relationship with the Islamic Army in Iraq, see the forthcoming CTC Harmony Focus, “Al-Qa'ida's Islamic State of Iraq and the Islamic Army” by Lydia Khalil.

<sup>21</sup> Statement Released online by the Islamic Army in Iraq, al-Mujahidin Army, Ansar al-Sunnah Legal Committee, al-Fatihin Army, HAMAS-Iraq, and the Islamic Front for Iraqi Resistance (JAMI). 12 October 07. See also: “Imminent Announcement of Large Alliance of Sunni Armed Groups” *Al-Hayah* 11 April 2007; Islamic Army in Iraq “Reply by the Islamic Army to the Speeches of Brother Abu Umar al-Baghdadi” 5 April 2007

Despite Zawahiri's conciliatory tone, there has been very little wiggle room in the ISI's dogma. The ISI has published doctrinal religious texts that unambiguously prioritize implementing Sharia rather than serving the everyday needs of the Iraqi people.<sup>22</sup> The questions posed to Zawahiri suggest that many in the Jihadist community question the results this approach has generated.<sup>23</sup> Zawahiri did very little to alleviate these concerns; instead he referred questioners to statements by the ISI's reputed Emir, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi. This tactic is problematic. First, al-Baghdadi's statements have contributed to the ISI's rift with the IAI in the past (despite a less confrontational tone recently), but most importantly there are very serious questions about whether or not Abu Umar al-Baghdadi is even a real person.

Indeed, one of the reasons questioners are so eager for Zawahiri to show leadership on Iraq is that al-Qa'ida in Iraq's actual leaders have been unable to do so since Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi was killed. When Abu Umar al-Baghdadi was named Emir of the ISI, many questioned al-Baghdadi's credentials.<sup>24</sup> Even would-be supporters argued that the Emir of an Islamic State should be a more prominent figure than the previously unknown al-Baghdadi. Since then, the U.S. Military has offered the testimony of captured ISI leaders as evidence that al-Baghdadi is fictitious, an allegation al-Qa'ida has not refuted with evidence.<sup>25</sup> Zawahiri has endorsed al-Baghdadi (so has Usama bin Laden), but that has not alleviated doubts among Jihadist supporters that AQ's operation in Iraq is in serious trouble. Even some of al-Qa'ida's commanders on the ground have suggested their post-Zarqawi leadership has been ineffective.<sup>26</sup>

In his 2 April response, Zawahiri tacitly endorsed al-Baghdadi by referring to his public statements. This response is unsatisfactory. As Zawahiri's attempt to reclaim the name "Abd al-Qadir ibn Abd al-Aziz" from Sayyid Imam illustrates, Jihadist groups have a long history of creating symbolic pseudonyms to represent entire organizations. Coupled with existing questions about al-Baghdadi's authenticity, Zawahiri's track record begs the question of whether the name "Abu Umar al-Baghdadi" is simply a placeholder pseudonym used by all of al-Qa'ida in Iraq's leadership cadre, rather than a single individual. The consequences of such a deceit are important. The majority of al-Qa'ida's

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<sup>22</sup> Uthman bin abd al-Rahman al-Tamimi. "Informing the People About the Birth of the Islamic State of Iraq" January 7, 2007. World News Network.

<sup>23</sup> Fishman, Brian. *Fourth Generation Governance: Sheikh Tamimi Defends the Islamic State of Iraq* West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point 23 March 2007  
[http://ctc.usma.edu/publications/pdf/ISI--Fourth\\_Gen4.pdf](http://ctc.usma.edu/publications/pdf/ISI--Fourth_Gen4.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Al-Rawi, Isam (Member of the Shura Council of the Association of Muslim Scholars) *Al-Jazirah* 15 October 2006

<sup>25</sup> Bergner, Kevin "Press Briefing on July 18, 2007" Baghdad, Iraq July 18, 2007 [http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12908&Itemid=131](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12908&Itemid=131)

<sup>26</sup> Interview in *Al-Arab Al-Arab* 12 February 2008 reposted on the Hanein Website

leadership in Iraq is non-Iraqi, whereas the name “Abu Umar al-Baghdadi” implies the individual is from Baghdad. In other words, the al-Baghdadi pseudonym is probably not just an attempt to conceal the real Emir’s identity, but to convince followers that a non-Iraqi leader had a visceral connection to Iraq.

Many posters hoped that Zawahiri would explain why the Iraqi-based Jihadist group *Ansar al-Islam* has not joined the ISI. This question is important because *Ansar al-Islam* has chosen to remain independent despite having an ideology very similar to al-Qa’ida and the ISI’s. Well-known Jihadist leaders have urged the union, including Zawahiri himself, Abu Hamzah al-Muhajir and Abu Umar al-Baghdadi.<sup>27</sup> Rather than answering these concerns substantively, Zawahiri reiterated his respect for *Ansar al-Islam* and referred supporters to his previous statements. For Jihadis, *Ansar al-Islam*’s intransigence raises questions about the ISI’s competence. Why would *Ansar al-Islam* avoid joining the ISI? Do they resent foreign control of the ISI? Do they question the strategic wisdom of the ISI’s leaders? Are there personal disagreements between the two elements? There have been numerous reports of violence and tension between the ISI and *Ansar al-Islam*.<sup>28</sup> Zawahiri is loath to answer such questions because the answers speak directly to the ISI’s weakness and dysfunction.<sup>29</sup>

### *Iran*

Many questioners asked Zawahiri to explain why al-Qa’ida has never attacked Iran. The question is critical for Zawahiri because many Jihadis consider Shi’a an even more important enemy than either the United States or “apostate” Sunnis. Although Zawahiri intentionally drew attention to the subject in his 2 April statement, he never substantively answered the questions, saying at one point about al-Qa’ida leader Sayf al-Adl’s presence in Iran, “it is something I am unable to tell...”

Al-Qa’ida and the Taliban have faced accusations of being too lenient toward the Shi’a since the 1990s. Although the Taliban fought occasional skirmishes with Iran, it was accused by some Jihadis of being overly tolerant of Shi’a religious

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<sup>27</sup> On December 9, 2007, Ansar al-Sunnah officially changed its name to Ansar al-Islam, thus retaking the name of the Kurdistan-based organization that Ansar al-Sunnah was founded from in the early days of the Iraq war. See: Abu Abdullah al-Shafi’i “Al-Ansar—History and Steadfastness” Al Buraq Islamic Network [www.alboraq.info](http://www.alboraq.info) December 9, 2007

<sup>28</sup> Sharia Office of Ansar al-Sunna, 22 January 2007. English: [http://ctc.usma.edu/publications/pdf/AAS\\_Letter\\_to\\_AOI.pdf](http://ctc.usma.edu/publications/pdf/AAS_Letter_to_AOI.pdf); Arabic: [http://ctc.usma.edu/publications/pdf/AAS\\_letter\\_to\\_AO\\_original.pdf](http://ctc.usma.edu/publications/pdf/AAS_letter_to_AO_original.pdf); al-Zawahiri, Ayman "Review of Events" [www.muslim.net](http://www.muslim.net) December 16, 2007

<sup>29</sup> For more, see the forthcoming Harmony Focus Report from the CTC, “Al-Qa’ida’s Islamic State of Iraq and Ansar al-Islam” written by Mohammed Hafez.



practices – such as the decoration of gravesites – in Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup> After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001, Iran became an important transit route for Jihadis fleeing the country. Two of the most important were Sayf al-Adl – one of al-Qa’ida’s most important military commanders – and Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, the Jihadist that would go on to found al-Qa’ida in Iraq. Some of those Jihadis have since left Iran, but others remain there, apparently detained by Iranian security forces.

In this context, questions asking Zawahiri why al-Qa’ida does not more publicly condemn or attack Iran, are quite damaging. Many in the Jihadist community would be infuriated if al-Qa’ida forged a quiet truce with Iran, even if its purpose was to ensure the safety of leadership figures imprisoned there. Fearing dishonor, some Jihadis have reacted vehemently when accused of making deals with Iran. Abu Jihad Khalil al-Hakaymah, head of al-Qa’ida’s operations in Egypt (and close ally of Zawahiri), quickly denounced remnants of the *Egyptian Islamic Group* when it claimed he cooperated with Iran to secure the release of his son.<sup>31</sup> Hakaymah’s quick temper on the subject is telling, but so is the *Islamic Group’s* belief that linking Hakaymah to Iran would discredit him in Jihadist circles.

Zawahiri did address one question about Iran: do the United States and Iran really have a dispute, or are they working together against al-Qa’ida? Zawahiri’s response was adamant:

“...the dispute between America and Iran is a real dispute based on the struggle over areas of influence, and the possibility of America striking Iran is a real possibility. As for what might happen in the region, I can only say that major changes will occur in the region, and the situation will be in the interest of the Mujahidin if the war saps both of them. If, however, one of them emerges victorious, its influence will intensify and fierce battles will begin between it and the Mujahidin.” (*Zawahiri, 2008: 21*)

Questioners hoping that Zawahiri would take this opportunity to condemn Iran more forcefully than he has previously will probably be dissatisfied in this statement. Those looking for a strong indication that al-Qa’ida is planning attacks inside Iran will likely be even more disappointed. Al-Qa’ida’s fundamental problem is that Iran – lying between Iraq and Afghanistan – is critical geography. Al-Qa’ida and other Jihadis do not want to provoke a

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<sup>30</sup> Al-Ruweili, Abu Bilal Badr Bin Musa’ed *Is Bin Laden a Caller to the Gates of Hell?* See Forthcoming translation and analysis of this text by Brian Fishman at [www.ctc.usma.edu](http://www.ctc.usma.edu)

<sup>31</sup> Al-Shaf’i, Muhammad. “Al-Qa’ida Leader Al-Hakaymah Responds to Islamic Group: Do not Underestimate me...and Qa’idat al-Jihad Shelters me, Al-Islambuli and Others Among the Leaders” *Asharq al-Awsat*, 26 November 2006.

backlash from Iran that would make transiting the country more difficult than it is already.

Nonetheless, there are clear strategic tensions between al-Qa'ida and Iran. Al-Qa'ida's ideology is vehemently anti-Shi'a, though it has been remarkably pragmatic about this conflict in the past. More practically, Iranian support for Hizballah and HAMAS bolsters two organizations that control the gateways to Israel. When Zawahiri calculates how al-Qa'ida should confront Iran, he must weigh ideology, the fate of al-Qa'ida operatives in the country, transit routes between Iraq and Afghanistan, and Iranian support for HAMAS and Hizballah, al-Qa'ida's non-state competitors who control the gateways to Israel. Such complexity does not lend itself to the red-meat statements he would like to feed his supporters in his 2 April release.

### **3. THE QUESTIONS POSED TO ZAWAHIRI**

The CTC acquired 1,888 questions posted for Zawahiri on the *Al-Ekhlās* and *Al-Hesbah* websites from the Department of Defense. We then coded those questions along thirty-nine thematic categories. Of the 1,888 discrete questions that we identified, 1,388 were posted to *Al-Ekhlās* and 500 were posted to *Al-Hesbah*.

Many of these questions were coded in multiple thematic categories as they addressed more than one issue. The CTC coded the vast majority of these questions before Zawahiri released Part I of his response on 2 April 2008.<sup>32</sup> The average question was coded into 2.5 categories.

Among the posting participants, we found that the most discrete questions came from Al-Qa'id al-'Am on the *Al-Hesbah Forum* at thirty-nine (39). Other prolific questioners included:

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<sup>32</sup> See Appendix A for a description of the categories.

Table 1

Poster	Number of Discrete Questions
Al-Qa'id al-'Am ( <i>Al-Hesbah</i> )	39
Nadah al-Damm ( <i>Al-Ekhlās</i> )	29
Basha'ir al-Nasr ( <i>Al-Ekhlās</i> )	20
Ayman ( <i>Al-Hesbah</i> )	19
Basha'ir al-Nasir ( <i>Al-Ekhlās</i> )	17
Abu-al-Zahra' ( <i>Al-Hesbah</i> )	15
Fourat Al-Sham ( <i>Al-Hesbah</i> )	15
Hiwar Ma' Mujahid ( <i>Al-Ekhlās</i> )	15
<i>Mutabi' Faqat</i> ( <i>Al-Ekhlās</i> )	15
Hanbali ( <i>Al-Hesbah</i> )	14
al-Qa'idah 1 ( <i>Al-Ekhlās</i> )	14

### HAMAS

93 questions (4.9% of the total 1,888) dealt in some way with the HAMAS. Those questions generally focused on the religious legitimacy of joining or supporting HAMAS. Representative questions on HAMAS include the following:

I am a member of Hamas and belong to the Executive Force and recently became members of the Palestinian Police. Each one knows that the current government governs with situational laws—I want to know, is this work considered permissible or not, especially since the (financial) situation in the Gaza Strip is difficult? Am I able to perhaps stay in this job or not?

- *Muhammad1004* (*Al-Ekhlās*)

After Hamas involvement in malicious politics, can we work under their Jihad flag to fight the Jewish?

- *Al Farris Al Qasimi* (*Al-Ekhlās*)

When you did Critiqued Hamas, you said at one point I give my condolences to the Islamic world for the Death of Hamas, then in your last speech you have asked them for advice, can you ask an advice from the dead, what are you trying to ask?

- *Hazem Al Sulban* (*Al-Ekhlās*)

Don't you think your messages to the Hamas organization should not be sent out openly so as not to bring about rumors and chaos?

- *-Qa'id al-'Am* (*Al-Hesbah*)

What do you think of Hamas' government in Gaza and its president Isma'il Haniyya? Is it a government of infidelity? Is its president an Infidel?

- *Zad Al-Gharib* (*Al-Hesbah*)

### ***Killing of Innocents***

We did not specifically code the 'killing of innocents' theme as we had developed our coding rules prior to Zawahiri's 2 April release. Even a cursory scan of the questions, however, shows that the 'killing of innocents' motif pervades is pervasive. Some of these questions include:

Many people in the Islamic World and the Land of Haramin in particular complains that Al-Qaeda organization was behind many operations that targeted innocents civilians and Muslims within the Islamic nations and many Muslims and children died as a result of such operations, do you think not that you are shedding prohibited and innocents blood (TC: according to the Islamic Sharia)?

- *Za'aim Al-Dhayab (Al-Ekhlās)*

The question is: Will the Organization offer any compensation to the families of the killed innocents? And if the answer is negative, then, will the Organization look into the idea of offering an apology and condolences to those of the families in the upcoming public address for example?

- *al-Islam Tariqi (Al-Ekhlās)*

Why does al-Qa'idah in the western Islamic states [TC: referencing Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia] announce its targets near and far, so it can avoid injuring innocents on accident?

- *al-Qasimi (Al-Ekhlās)*

### ***Yusuf al-Qaradawi***

Despite the priority that Zawahiri placed on answering a question regarding Yusuf al-Qaradawi, we found that only five of our 1,888 questions, or less than one-percent, dealt with Qaradawi by name. We found that twenty-three of 1,888 questions, or just over one-percent, dealt explicitly with the Muslim Brotherhood. Three of the five total questions on Qaradawi included:

What is the ruling on the ulama of the Sultan, like the barking dog Yusuf al-Qardawi and the ulama of al-Salul?

- *Abu-Shakhshukha (Al-Hesbah)*

What is you opinion of Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, 'Amru Khalid, Salman al-'Udah, and Khalid al-Rashid? ( May God free him)

- *Ahmad Hamzah (Al-Ekhlaas)*

What is your personal opinion concerning the problem of Yusif Al-Qaradawi and the other groveling scholars who are like him?

- *Mohibb al-'Iyayri Wa Aldandani (Al-Hesbah)*

### ***Fatah al-Islam***

78 questions (4.1%) dealt with *Fatah al-Islam* in some way. Most of these questions reflected a desire for Zawahiri to clarify his position toward them. Some representative questions on this matter included:

Our Sheik we did not hear any thing or any respond about our brothers of Fateh Al Islam, do you have any communications or organization , do you have any good news if there was coordination's?

- *Abu Qatada. Al Yamani (Al-Ekhlās)*

(TC: speaking of supporting Fatah Al-Islam) Wasn't it an opportunity of empowerment in Lebanon and opening another front especially there are a large number of supports and a land for Al-Qaeda in Lebanon in addition to the line of support from the Sunni in Syria, but you were satisfied with your respond toward Hamas?

- *hhh1(Al-Ekhlās)*

Why don't you clarify your position from Fath Al-Islam and their battle at Nahr Al-Barid north of Lebanon?

- *Abu Musa'ab Al-Shahabi (Al-Hesbah)*

Even though the Brothers in Fath al-Islam group are not one of your branches, why didn't you support them like you did with the other groups in Somalia and other places? Isn't it the duty of brothers to do so? Are there reasons preventing you from doing so?

- *Al-Gharib al-Shami (Al-Hesbah)*

### ***Islamic State of Iraq***

Just over 6% of the questions that we coded dealt with the Islamic State of Iraq or Al-Qa`ida's evolving presence in that country. Many of the questions centered on its relationship with other insurgent groups, its connection to the High Command and its current operations. Some of the representative questions included:

The issue of the announcement of the Islamic State in Iraq, and that is good. But is the Islamic State established only on the understanding of

fighting and blood, or is there general understanding by the State of economics, education, society, etc.? That is, is the State in general understood? And is rallying under the leadership of the State coercive and forced?

- *Hiwar Ma' Mujahid (Al-Ekhlal)*

In the occasion of appointing Shaykh Abu-'Umar al-Baghdadi as a Emir to the Islamic State of Iraq, did you take the permission of Shura Council unanimously, is the absence of some of Council members prevented them from giving their opinions and their agreement on the new appointment.

- *Sayf Khalid (Al-Ekhlal)*

Concerning the Islamic State of Iraq, what position do you expect the Arab leaders to take (The tyrants) toward the State particularly since it's considered a big blow against America and its agents?

- *Isir Al-Hurayah (Al-Ekhlal)*

They say that most of al-Qa'idah's followers in Iraq are not fully knowledgeable in the Shari'ah due to the fast expansion of the Islamic State and that this has led to catastrophic mistakes of killing opponents and those who refused to pledge their allegiance? What is your response to that?

- *Basha'ir al-Nasr (Al-Ekhlal)*

What's your stance vis-a-vis the hypocrites' claims against the Islamic State of Iraq?

- *Fourat Al-Sham (Al-Hesbah)*

### ***Iran***

78 questions (4.2%) directed to Zawahiri dealt specifically with the subject of Iran. Some of these questions focused on Al-Qa'ida's official position toward them, others inquired about whether a back-door arrangement had been forged between Al-Qa'ida and Iran, what the status is of alleged Al-Qa'ida detainees in Iran and what America's future intentions are vis-à-vis Iran. Representative questions included:

Is it true that the Iranian regime has in custody well-known al-Qaeda leaders in order to use you in a war against Sunni countries?

- *Abu-al-Khattab al-Muhajir (Al-Ekhlal)*

Do you support a simultaneous attack on Iranian interests and the interests of the Crusaders?

- *Al-Ashaj (Al-Ekhlās)*

What is your response to whoever alleges that there are secret relations between al-Qa'idah and Iran?

- *Ekhlaaso (Al-Ekhlās)*

What will happen to Sayf al-'Adil and Salman Abu-Ghayth if a war is launched against Iran?

- *Layth al-Zawba'i (Al-Ekhlās)*

Where is Iran in your media campaign, we did not hear any honest release out of you why?

- *Abu Abd Al Razaq (Al-Ekhlās)*

How is it that Shaykh Sayf al-'Adl lives in Iran, the country that kills our sons, rapes our women and, alters our religion and Quran, and yet they don't harm him? And how could he live there without declaring Jihad against them? His presence there raises many questions and great bewilderment! I ask you to explain it to us, Our Beloved Shaykh!

- *Abu Abdul Razzaq (Al-Hesbah)*

After the latest discourse over Iran's shameless stands, could you tell us about the condition of our brothers and shaykhs who are imprisoned by the Iranian regime?

- *Sayf al-Adl al-Madani (Al-Hesbah)*

### ***Other Notable Questions***

Beyond the highlighted themes above, a large number of creative and provocative questions were submitted by way of *Al-Ekhlās* and *Al-Hesbah*. We found the following questions to be particularly compelling:

If you were afforded the opportunity to have a dialogue with the US and its president George Bush... will you accept to talk? What will you ask of the Americans?

- *Barq (Al-Ekhlās)*

Who is the highest ranking woman in Al Qaeda? No names, if you wish, but rather what is their function in the organization?

- *Aboalbara (Al-Ekhlās)*



Shaykh Ayman, I am married to a man who is inactive in jihad, and I am afraid for him. By God, I nag him night and day that he fights the war himself, but he makes frivolous excuses. What do you suggest for men who do not want to take part in jihad? For they weigh heavily on the hearts of women.

- *Umm-Hatim (Al-Ekhlās)*

Do you advise us to establish cells to attack internet sites as a form of jihad?

- *Abu-Dharr Al-Asad (Al-Hesbah)*

Do you think America would make its nuclear weapons as a final solution to deal with the mujahidin like they did in Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Could using a nuclear weapon be the tactic they would use before their withdrawal in defeat?

- *Hanbali (Al-Hesbah)*

Why don't you offer a Masters and PhD program or theological research program under your supervision and direction and which would be posted by the mujahidin and their supporters on the Internet?

- *Zahif Al-Anwar (Al-Hesbah)*

Can we support the mujahidin using money earned in law firms and stock markets? Are these types of vocations allowed under Shari'ah Law?

- *Murad al-Samara'i (Al-Hesbah)*

Additionally, questions were asked by a number of other relevant themes to the counterterrorism community. Below, we identify several of those themes and provide several representative questions under each.

### ***Women and Jihad: 20 questions***

What are the roles of the women in Al Qaeda organization, we see Al Qaeda nothing but men's elders and Mujahedeen's, but we never hear anything about the women?

- *Ashq Al Shahada (Al-Ekhlās)*

Does a sister with a sponsor (Muahrem) have the right to migrate to the Islamic and of Afghanistan if she get the opportunity?

- *Hafiedah Ibrahim (Al-Ekhlās)*

We are the mothers and wives of the martyrs. What words of advice would you say to us about motivating our husbands and sons for jihad?

- *al-'Izzatulillah (Al-Ekhlās)*

Is it acceptable for a woman to carry out a martyrdom operation if she is able to travel to the Jihad?, and is it considered a risk for her to travel without a close male relative despite her being a martyr for the cause of God?

- *Ashiqat al-Shahadah (Al-Ekhlās)*

### ***Abu Musab al-Suri: 18 questions***

Should we practice individual Jihad in any possible method such as what our sheikh Abu Musa'ab Al-Suri advises, May God set him free from captivity or should we flee to the Land of Jihad in any possible way? Is the global media Jihad an excuse for us to stay in the nations of Kufar especially most of us work and pay taxes to the government of Kufar who finance the military that kills, rapes and spreads corruption in the Islamic nation with those taxes?

- *Abu Almuthanna (Al-Ekhlās)*

Why don't you encourage Jihad members to follow the plan of imprisoned Shaykh Abu-Mus'ab al-Suri?

- *Aboalbara (Al-Ekhlās)*

### ***Shaikh Bin Baz: 12 questions***

We desire of you to explain your position and the positions of Mujahidin concerning the scholars of authority particularly Ibn Baz and Ibn Uthayman where many good people were misled of the fact that those scholars are agents of the authority. I ask you by God to identify the Sharia position so the path can be clear to the Muslims???

- *Abu Al-Qa'aqa Al-Tumaimi (Al-Ekhlās)*

Since it will be sufficient if you can make a comment about the debate between you on one hand and Bin-Baz and Bin-'Uthayman on the other hand bearing in mind that many reputable Saudi clerics were their students, what are the pedagogies that the followers of al-Qaeda and jihad should follow?

- *Abu-al-Khattab al-Muhajir (Al-Ekhlās)*

## CONCLUSION

In sum, Zawahiri's Part I responses reveal several insights about Zawahiri as a man, as a leader as well as al-Qa'ida's strategy more generally. We will continue our analysis of Zawahiri's Part II upon their publication.

- 1. Zawahiri is deeply concerned about rising discontent within the Jihadist community.** Zawahiri's initial decision to hold a virtual press conference demonstrated that he feels the need to resolve concerns among Jihadis about the future of the movement. Zawahiri's answers revealed deep-seated worries about the controversies created by al-Qa'ida's killing of innocents and Zawahiri's feud with Sayyid Imam Sharif.
- 2. Zawahiri revealed information on Jihadist propaganda strategy that substantiates the U.S. Government's claim that the Emir of al-Qa'ida's Islamic State of Iraq is fictitious.** Zawahiri's claim that the *al-Jihad* organization used the pseudonym "Abd al-Qadir ibn Abd al-Aziz" as a public personification of the group's entire leadership structure lends credence to the claim that Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, the ISI's reputed Emir, is fictitious. Al-Baghdadi's credibility is important because the ISI faces a severe credibility challenge, at least in part because al-Baghdadi has no public record of scholarship or Jihad.
- 3. Al-Qa'ida's conflict with HAMAS is growing as is Al-Qa'ida's interest in Lebanon; these two parallel trends suggest that the prospects of an al-Qa'ida attack on Israel are increasing.** As al-Qa'ida redefines itself after suffering major setbacks in Iraq, Lebanon's instability and the propaganda benefits of striking Israel create serious incentives for al-Qa'ida in Iraq to send agents to the Levant. Al-Qa'ida is likely to encounter serious opposition from both HAMAS and Hizballah in these regions and must prepare its supporters for a conflict with organizations widely seen as defenders of Muslims and Arabs. Al-Qa'ida's recent propaganda campaign against HAMAS is likely part of that effort.
- 4. Al-Qa'ida continues to view the Muslim Brotherhood as one of its most dangerous opponents.** The Brotherhood offers conservative Sunni Muslims an opportunity to channel their frustrations and grievances in a non-violent way. Because the Brotherhood draws on many of the same sources of intellectual inspiration and religious justification as the Jihadists, it is viewed by Al-Qa'ida as one of the primary threats to its long-term viability.

## APPENDIX A

We coded the 1,888 questions along 39 thematic categories. Below is our definition of coding themes.

1. Salafism: Questions about Salafi religious doctrine, its application in Jihadist warfare, and the acceptability of certain practices.
2. AQ High Command: Questions about specific leaders in al-Qa'ida, their well-being, and relationship with each other.
3. Operations: Questions about al-Qa'ida's violent attacks in the past and future.
4. AQ Future: Questions about al-Qa'ida's future strategy and security.
5. Media: Questions about al-Qa'ida's media strategy and the influence of Western media.
6. West: Questions about the strategy of Western countries and al-Qa'ida's strategy toward them.
7. Israel/Palestine: Questions about Palestinian violence against Israel and al-Qa'ida's strategy to support Palestinians. Many of these questions asked about al-Qa'ida's perspective on HAMAS.
8. Joining: Questions related to participating in or joining an organization to include playing a supporting role.
9. Scholars: Questions that referred to Islamic scholars, Jihadi or otherwise.
10. Youth\_Ed: Questions concerning Muslim youth or Jihadist educational programs.
11. Afghan: Questions regarding the country and governing regime of Afghanistan, to include its past, present or future.
12. Zawahiri: Questions discussing Zawahiri on a personal level, to include his writings, positions, past actions, etc.
13. Saudi: Questions regarding the country and governing regime of Saudi Arabia.
14. Lebanon: Questions regarding the country and governing regime of Lebanon.
15. Egypt: Questions regarding the country and governing regime of Egypt.
16. Syria: Questions regarding the country and governing regime of Syria.
17. Iran: Questions regarding the country and governing regime of Iran
18. HAMAS: Questions regarding the HAMAS organization.
19. ISI: Questions regarding Al-Qa'ida in Iraq operating under the name, the Islamic State of Iraq, or ISI.
20. Iraq: Questions regarding the country and governing regime of Iraq.
21. Fatah Islam: Questions regarding the group, *Fatah al-Islam*.
22. Kufr: Questions where infidelity, apostasy or excommunication is used against another party.
23. Pakistan: Questions regarding the country and governing regime of Pakistan
24. Taliban: Questions regarding the Taliban regime.

25. Maghreb: Questions regarding the country of Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, Tunisia and Libya.
26. Somalia: Questions regarding the country and governing regime of Somalia
27. Jews: Questions where the word “Jew” or a different derogatory term is used in order to refer Jewish people is used explicitly.
28. Shiism: Question
29. IR: Questions regarding international relations, including the foreign policy of other country.
30. Media: Questions regarding issues related to media, both from a Jihadist perspective and a non-Jihadist perspective; includes video, audio, written, web-based forms of communication.
31. Ikhwan: Refers to questions regarding the Muslim Brotherhood organization and individuals affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood.
32. Caliphate: Includes questions on the topic of establishment of the global Islamic Caliphate.
33. Women: Questions specifically regarding women.
34. Dr Fadh: Questions related to Sayyid Imam Sharif, also known as Dr. Fadl.
35. Gheith: Questions regarding Sulayman Abu Gheith.
36. Binbaz: Questions regarding Shaikh Bin Baz.
37. Suri: Questions regarding Abu Musab al-Suri, also known as Mustafa Setmariam Nasr.
38. Jordan: Questions regarding the country of Jordan
39. Prisoners: Questions regarding prisoners or the topic of imprisonment; includes Jihadist and non-Jihadist imprisonment.