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INSIGHTS

Hamza bin Osama bin Laden – Leader of Al-Qaeda's New Generation?

Recently, Hamza bin Laden has been mentioned in the media as a candidate with a very high probability of succeeding Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri as the next leader of Al-Qaeda. There are those who describe Hamza as “the representative of the new generation of Al-Qaeda” or as “the new face of Al-Qaeda” in light of his increased speeches on audio clips published by the organization during the last year.

Hamza bin Laden, the son of Osama bin Laden, who was the leader of Al-Qaeda until 2011, plays a role in the organization’s dawah system despite his young age. Thanks to his family name, in the eyes of the organization’s followers, the young bin Laden represents a longing to return to the glory days of the organization. In addition, the organization hopes that, because of his young age, he represents the “future generation of Al-Qaeda” and will succeed in bringing back to the organization those youth who preferred to blindly follow the Islamic State.

Despite the fact that his many appearances in the media in the framework of the organization’s dawah activities place Hamza as al-Zawahiri’s successor, few know his biography.¹

The biography of Hamza bin Laden

Hamza bin Laden (aka “Abu Moaz”) was born in 1991 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and later moved with his father and mother to Sudan. His mother, Khairiah Sabar, who was the third wife of Sheikh Osama bin Laden, held a doctorate in child psychology and was a former academic lecturer at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. Hamza was her only child with Osama and because of her he learned to speak several languages. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Hamza and his mother moved to Iran after Al-Qaeda held negotiations with Iran on the subject. There, the young bin Laden’s ideology was formulated by members of the Taliban who were responsible for his safety. In 2007, Osama bin Laden began negotiations with Iran regarding the return of Iranian captives who were being held by Al-Qaeda in exchange for Al-Qaeda members who were being held by Iran, including his son, Hamza. As a result, Al-Qaeda succeeded in bringing Osama bin Laden’s family out of Iran to various areas, including Syria (his son, Mohammed) and Pakistan. The first to receive permission to leave Iran was Saad bin Laden, bin Laden’s son, who left together with his wife, Khadija. In 2009, he

¹ July 11, 2016. <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/hamza-bin-laden-who-crown-prince-terror-son-heir-osama-bin-ladens-al-qaeda-1570065>

was killed in a US drone strike and some believe that, as a result of his death, his brother became the presumed heir of Al-Qaeda.

In 2011, Hamza and his mother also left Iran and Osama bin Laden sent his wife, Khairiah Sabar, Hamza's mother, a letter in which he congratulated them on leaving Iran's hold. In total, Hamza was in Iran for ten years from 2001-2011. According to several sources, he married the daughter of Ayman al-Zawahiri and they had two children, Saad and Khairiah.²

In May 2011, Hamza was apparently not with his father in the Abbottabad compound in Pakistan when it was attacked by US Marines. Hamza's mother was captured in the raid by the Americans and his father and older brother, Khaled, were killed. Documents found in the compound testify to the fact that his assistants had tried to unite Hamza with his father as per his father's request, but it was apparently not possible due to the security situation and concern for Hamza's fate.³

According to CNN, Hamza spent most of his life near his father and was considered by him to have superior abilities and a good memory. From a young age, he also showed a desire to join the ranks of the mujahideen. He used to join all of his father's meetings during his travels as well as his meetings at the organization's Shura Council. According to Arab analysts, Hamza was endowed with his father's charisma.

Correspondence that was discovered at bin Laden's estate demonstrated how much concern Osama had for his son, Hamza. For example, Osama bin Laden asked Hamza, his mother and his brother to move to Qatar and not to travel to Waziristan, Pakistan, until the storm passes. In addition, during Hamza's time in Iran, bin Laden made sure that his son received intellectual, ideological and religious training, but he stressed that did not want Hamza to take part in military exercises due to his concern for his safety. He restated his desire that Hamza be sent to Qatar in order to study Islamic law.

Despite his father's wishes, the documents indicated that Hamza actually requested to receive military training and join the organization's fighters, and not to continue to receive special treatment for being "bin Laden's son". Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, who served in a senior role in the organization

² July 28, 2016. <http://www.assakina.com/news/news1/91360.html>

³ May 22, 2016. <https://www.alarabiya.net/ar/saudi-today/2016/05/22/%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%B2%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%86-%D8%B7%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A9-.html>

until his death in 2011 and was responsible for Hamza's safety, noted in his letters that Hamza received training in preparing and activating explosives and underwent military training.

Letters that were found in Osama bin Laden's estate indicated that the father wrote that Hamza was the son closest to him and that he intended to appoint him as successor of the organization.⁴

Nevertheless, it seems that al-Zawahiri does not approve of the idea that the younger bin Laden will lead Al-Qaeda, which could create internal tension among the ranks of the organization's leaders.

Today, Hamza bin Laden is in his 20's, lives in Qatar and plays a role in Al-Qaeda's dawah system. The question is whether he will succeed in restoring Al-Qaeda to its former glory on the battlefield after the organization lost power under al-Zawahiri's leadership with the rise of the Islamic State.

Hamza's appearances in the jihadist media, analyzed by year

In 2001, four of bin Laden's sons, including Hamza, appeared in a video against the backdrop of the ruins of a US helicopter that was allegedly shot down by the Taliban. Some claim that Hamza can be seen in this clip reciting a poem about Kabul and praising the leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Mullah Omar.⁵

In 2003, he took part in an audio clip that was published on one of Al-Qaeda's forums, in which he called for the organization's fighters in Kabul, Baghdad and Gaza to declare jihad against the US, Britain and France.

Some claim that in **August 2005**, Hamza appeared in a video along with Taliban fighters who attacked Pakistani soldiers in southern Waziristan.⁶

In 2008, when he was 18 years old, he appeared in a video in which he called for the destruction of Britain and its allies, and also attacked the US, Denmark and France.

Beginning in **August 2015**, there was a rise in the number of Hamza bin Laden's appearances in Al-Qaeda's propaganda, indicating his importance in the organization. It should be noted that all of the recordings were audio recordings. There is no record of photos of Hamza bin Laden since he was a

⁴ January 5, 2017. <http://www.ibtimes.com/who-hamza-bin-laden-osamas-son-terrorist-al-qaeda-propaganda-state-department-says-2470355>

⁵ November 8, 2001. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1644044.stm

⁶ July 15, 2016. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20160715-we-are-all-osama-could-hamza-bin-laden-revive-al-qaeda/>

child.

In **August 2015**, he appeared in an audio clip titled, “Greetings to the People of Islam” in which he called for attacks against the US and Israel, swore allegiance to Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, and praised Abu Baseer al-Wuhayshi, the leader of AQAP. In addition, he congratulated al-Zawahiri and called him a friend of his father’s path to jihad. The young bin Laden then asked to move the arena of battle from Kabul, Baghdad and Gaza to Washington, London, Paris and Tel Aviv, and to strike American, western and Jewish targets around the world. He claimed that this way, more lone fighters will take part in terrorist attacks against western countries.⁷

Some claim that, through this clip, al-Zawahiri presented Hamza bin Laden as an official member of Al-Qaeda, while Al-Qaeda’s media network referred to him as “emir”.



In **2016**, bin Laden continued to call for attacks against western capital cities as well as the unification of factions in Syria, and he tried to motivate the tribes in Saudi Arabia to unite with Al-Qaeda’s branch in Yemen in order to fight against the Saudi Kingdom.

In **May 2016**, Hamza bin Laden took part in an audio clip titled, “Jerusalem is a bride and our blood is her dowry” in which he called on Muslims, especially jihad fighters in Syria, to unite in order to prepare the ground for the liberation of Palestine. According to him, the Syrian revolution has increased the chances of liberating Jerusalem. Hamza also leveled criticism at Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi for his declaration of the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate under his leadership in 2014. In this context, he added that Al-Qaeda succeeded in expanding its influence despite the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate. He called for continued attacks against the West, including “lone wolf” attacks as a means of liberating Jerusalem.⁸

It should be noted that the above-mentioned message by Hamza bin Laden was released the day

⁷ August 14, 2015. <https://alfidaa.info/vb/showthread.php?t=112427>

⁸ May 9, 2016. <http://ia801504.us.archive.org/18/items/hamza-quds>

after al-Zawahiri's speech regarding the importance of cohesion among the ranks of the mujahideen in Syria against their enemies. Hamza also appeared in al-Zawahiri's audio, praising the Syrian revolution for its adherence to the correct path.

As a result of the above-mentioned speech, Al-Qaeda supporters launched a discussion on Twitter under the hashtag, "Jerusalem is our bride with our blood as dowry". The discourse that arose mainly contained praise for Hamza for his focus on the issue of purifying Al-Aqsa Mosque of the presence of Jews. "When I read the title...! I saw [in my spirit] Osama bin Laden, in his voice and his image, bring the issue to the top of the agenda. Our nation, this is the time..." Another supporter wrote, "At a time when everyone is busy with the war in Al-Sham, Hamza bin Laden reminded the nation of its first wound in order to help the intifada of Jerusalem".



In **July 2016**, in an audio clip titled, "We are All Osama", Hamza bin Laden threatened to avenge his father's death. According to him, Al-Qaeda will continue to strike the US in response to the oppression suffered by Muslims in several Muslim Arab countries. He threatened that "we will continue to cling to jihad for the sake of Allah, we will continue along this path, and we will continue to strike you in your lands and to attack you in your lands and beyond for your injustice towards the people of Palestine, Afghanistan, the Levant, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia and the rest of the Islamic countries that are subject to your oppression". In the same clip, he warned the Americans that they would constitute targets in the US and abroad.⁹

⁹ July 10, 2016. <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/international/2016/7/10/-حمزة-بن-لادن-يتوعد-أميركا-ويهدد-بالتن-لوالده>



In **August 2016**, in an audio clip titled, “About the Intifada of the People of the Holy Place [meaning Mecca] – Part 1”, Hamza bin Laden called for the tribes in Saudi Arabia to unite with Al-Qaeda’s branch in Yemen in order to fight against the Saudi regime. According to him, the Saudi authorities are carrying out a policy of oppression against its Sunni residents, and are allowing the opening of marine and land bases, and airports for western countries. Hamza went on to explain that the Saudi regime is considered an enemy of Islam and Muslims, and that its downfall will benefit Muslims, not only due to the religious significance of the region but also due to its strategic, geographic and economic importance. He added that by overthrowing the Saudi regime, it will be possible to liberate the lands of the Arabian Peninsula from the Crusaders, protect two holy places from the Shi’ites, and establish a new regime with shari’a as its constitution. To this end, “we call on all Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula to take part in the change by using the tongue, the pen, propaganda and tweets (on Twitter)”. In addition, Hamza called for toppling other tyrant regimes, intensifying propaganda campaigns among Muslims, working to free prisoners, and more. Towards the end of his speech, Hamza called on Muslims with physical and mental abilities to join the ranks of the mujahideen and fulfill the obligation of jihad.¹⁰



The banner of Hamza bin Laden’s speech

¹⁰ August 17, 2016. <https://justpaste.it/xd14>

It should be noted that, due to his public statements in the framework of Al-Qaeda, in January 2017 Hamza bin Laden was put on the list of terrorists with sanctions imposed on them by the United States.¹¹

In conclusion, Hamza bin Laden's increased appearances in the media in the framework of Al-Qaeda raises the question of whether he will inherit al-Zawahiri's place as leader of Al-Qaeda. The fact that he is described as "charismatic" and "loved among the ranks of the organization", in contrast to the current leader's lack of charisma, and because he is the son of Osama bin Laden, give him a good starting point and make him a leading candidate for the organization's leadership. However, there are those who claim that the time has not yet come for Hamza to lead the organization as he has yet to carry out a significant operation that would earn him respect among the jihad fighters who have been fighting for over 30 years. Additionally, the fact that he is currently living outside Afghanistan does not play to his advantage. In this context, it should be noted that the claim was raised in the Saudi newspaper, *Al-Hayat*, that just as Akhtar Mansour (the previous leader of the Taliban) did not approve of the appointment of Mullah Omar's son as leader of the organization, the current leader of Al-Qaeda, al-Zawahiri, should not be expected to clear the way for Hamza and enable his appointment as leader of the organization.¹²

¹¹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38522777>

¹² May 16, 2016. <http://raseef22.com/politics/2016/05/16/%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%B8%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%B2%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%9F-%D9%88%D9%87%D9%84-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B2%D9%85/>

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The Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group (JWVG) is a specialized research and analysis team at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT). Composed of researchers fluent in Arabic, the JWVG monitors websites that support and serve the Global Jihad organizations. The unique characteristic of JWVG publications is the team's integration of diverse materials from a wide variety of Arabic sources. JWVG connects each source to larger trends, providing a complete understanding of events on both a local and a global scale.

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