

Reactions on Jihadi online forums regarding the publication of Bin-Laden's new audio tape

Background

On January 14th 2009 the Jihadi online forums¹ published a new audio tape by Al-Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden, entitled "A call for Jihad to stop the aggression against Gaza". The tape was produced by the "As-Sahab" institute, considered to be one of the main media centers producing messages distributed by Al-Qaeda on the internet.

On the tape, Bin Laden calls on Muslims to open a Jihad campaign in order to stop the Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip, and added that the Muslims identify with the fate of the Palestinians in the struggle against the Zionist-Crusader coalition, as he calls it. In addition, he threatened to create new Jihad arenas and pleaded with the Muslims to join the Jihad warriors in the battle against the "enemy". In addition, Bin Laden condemns the Arabic governments that prevented their people from acting for the Palestinians².

It should be mentioned that Bin Laden's previous audio tape, published in May 2008, also dealt with the situation in Gaza. In that tape, Bin Laden called on the Muslims to help the Palestinians in removing the siege on Gaza³.

¹ It should be mentioned that like in similar cases, the audio tape was uploaded to the "YouTube" clip sharing website.

² For a translation of Bin Laden's words into English, see:

<http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefabinladen0109.pdf>.

It should also be emphasized that the Jihadi online forum members published guidelines on how to distribute Bin Laden's words (in mosques, stores and on the internet):

<http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=42534>

³ See in this regard: <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefabinladen0508-2.pdf>



Bin Laden's new audio tape; in the background, the Al-Aqsa Mosque

The dialogue on Jihadi online forums

Bin Laden's words have aroused, as expected, much interest amongst Jihadi online forum surfers. Alongside praise, glorification and enthusiasm⁴, many surfers tried to understand if his words contain any clues.

First and foremost, surfers wondered which were the new target arenas mentioned by Bin Laden on the tape. Names of many regions and countries were thrown into the air. It is possible that this is wishful thinking, pleading and attempts at persuasion, but some surfers brought forth learned and reasoned explanations, causing two surfers at the Al-Faloja forum to deviate from the "guessing game" and call for maintaining a blackout. The two warned that the "enemy" is following these correspondences closely, even though he too is analyzing Bin Laden's words. According to them, there is no point to all of these

⁴ Thus, for example, a surfer on the "Al-Faloja" forum calls for conquering America and establishing there Islamic caliphates headed by Bin Laden.

interpretations and information, as it may hurt the Mujahideen, and maybe even expose their plans. It is possible these words made an impression and the deluge of evaluations stopped on January 17th in the early hours of the morning⁵.

It should also be mentioned that much like in similar cases, this time several online forums stopped their activity several hours after the publication of the tape, and were probably attacked by foreign groups.

The potential target arenas as viewed by the surfers

As stated, many surfers tried to assess which are the new Jihad arenas mentioned by Bin Laden. Following is a list of several potential targets that came up in the correspondence between the surfers in the Jihadi online forums:

- Jordan – one of the surfers explained why Egypt is not the next target, but Jordan: according to him, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt are fools who do not understand a thing and who will support the government and therefore it will be difficult to operate there, even though Al-Qaeda has carried out several operations there, such as in Sinai. However, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan is not in the same position as in Egypt. Secondly, some of them have already begun following the Jihadi Salafiia, a fact that stood out when some of them expressed their condolences for the death of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, Al-Qaeda's former leader in Iraq. Thirdly, the stage has been set following the events in Gaza. Fourthly, the protestors in Egypt did not hoist pictures of the Mujahideen but of members of Hamas, unlike Jordan, where these pictures were shown freely, and talk in favor of Jihad was heard on the streets and in the mosques⁶.

⁵ <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=42039>,
<http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=42039&page=2>,
<http://hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=86559>

⁶ <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=42039&page=3>

- Egypt – another surfer claimed that the next target is Egypt, as two years ago the establishment of a new Al-Qaeda affiliate in Egypt was announced, supervised by Sheikh Al-Hakayma⁷.
- Pakistan and Iran – in order to complete the territorial sequence with Iraq and to establish a large Islamic emirate⁸.
- The Pattani district in southern Thailand – one of the surfers mentioned that the leaders in this region declared they will begin Jihad activities in January or February 2009, and swear allegiance to Al-Qaeda⁹.
- The United States – another surfer explained that Al-Qaeda has been operating for years in a foreign land, is well prepared, equipping its people and activists, and that is why he believes it will be the United States, which is at present in a state of limpness¹⁰. To this one should add that one of the surfers interpreted Bin Laden's sentence: "I would like to reassure you, my Islamic nation [...] that we believe that Allah has bestowed on us patience that will enable us to continue Jihad for another seven years, seven more after that, and even seven more after that, if Allah wills it", as a clue for January 21st (7+7+7), one day after the inauguration of the new American president, Barak Obama¹¹.
- Somalia and Algeria – another surfer explained that the meaning is not that Al-Qaeda will declare the establishing of a new affiliate in an already declared front, such as the Caucasus. Declaring a front means that Al-Qaeda would begin fighting in an area where the organization has not fought before, and therefore fighting does not mean carrying out quality operations, but a

⁷ <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=42039&page=3>

⁸ <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=42039>

⁹ <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=42039&page=3>

¹⁰ <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=42039>

¹¹ <http://hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=86573>

consistent ongoing confrontation with the enemy like in Somalia and Algeria¹².

Another surfer was understanding of the need for secrecy and not rushing to expose the plans for the future, so as not to expose the cards in the organization's hands. According to him, this differentiates Al-Qaeda from the rest of the Islamic organizations causing much confusion and restlessness amongst the "enemies". The surfer even called the wealthy to join the Jihad campaign, after Bin Laden has paved the way for them. He concludes by pleading with the people of Palestine to spread Bin Laden's words among the fighting groups, in mosques, at homes, in the streets and in public places¹³.

It should be emphasized that in the Jihadi dialogue many more places came up as potential targets for Jihad. These include, among others, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan, Turkey, Europe, Central Asia, Central Africa, Australia, Ukraine, Belarus, India, Senegal, Nigeria and the Sahara Desert.

Conclusion

The latest audio tape by Bin Laden constitutes a direct continuation of the stream of remarks made by the senior leadership of Al-Qaeda since the beginning of the "Cast Lead" campaign on December 27th 2008. On January 16th 2009, two days after the publication of Bin Laden's tape, the leader of "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb Organization" (AQIM), Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud, called on the Muslims

¹² <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=42039&page=3>

¹³ <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=42031>

to attack American and Israeli targets¹⁴; on January 10th 2009, Abu Omar Al-Baghdadi, one of Al-Qaeda's leaders in Iraq, published an announcement calling on the Palestinians to begin a global campaign against Israeli and American targets; four days earlier, on January 6th, a tape made by Al-Qaeda's no 2, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, was published, calling on Muslims around the world to attack Israeli and western targets¹⁵; in addition to all of these, many surfers in Jihadi forums called to avenge the Palestinian blood and attack Israeli, Jewish and western targets around the world¹⁶.

Notwithstanding, it should be emphasized that this is not the first time the Al-Qaeda leadership calls for unifying ranks with the Palestinians; on June 25th 2007 an audio tape by Ayman Al-Zawahiri was published, where he called on the Hamas movement to join the rest of the Mujahideen around the world¹⁷. Even before that, on March 2006, Al-Zawahiri called on the Hamas to continue its armed struggle with Israel, in view of the movement's victory in the Palestinian elections¹⁸. Furthermore, cells of global Jihad groups around the world have already been active for over two years in the Gaza strip¹⁹, and the Al-Qaeda journal called "Jannat" (Paradises) has been published in the Gaza strip for several years now. These Jihad groups came to countries in the Middle East, such as Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Gaza, or grew out of the local

¹⁴ <http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2009/01/16/monitor/entry4726827.shtml>,
<http://www.shamikh.com/vb/showthread.php?t=32060>

¹⁵ It should be emphasized that Al-Zawahiri's words were translated into Albanian as well, as part of the efforts made by the global Jihad organizations in reaching as wide an audience as possible:
<http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=42385>.

About the efforts of Jihad organizations in addressing new target audiences see:
<http://ict.org.il/Portals/0/Internet%20Monitoring%20Group/JWMG%20-%20Al-Qaeda%20Invests%20In%20Propaganda%20for%20Spanish-Speaking%20Target%20Audiences.pdf>,
http://ict.org.il/Portals/0/Internet%20Monitoring%20Group/JWMG_Switzerland_Radical_Islam.pdf

¹⁶ http://www.ict.org.il/Portals/0/Internet%20Monitoring%20Group/JWMG_Global_Jihad_Against_Israel_the_West.pdf

¹⁷ <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/8BA3E717-627F-4368-B573-1D9E3B7ED40F.htm>

¹⁸ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4775222.stm

¹⁹ http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/Hebrew/heb_n/pdf/gj_030208.pdf

Islamic groups. The recruitment to Jihad activity under the umbrella of Al-Qaeda stems, amongst other things, from the influence of the organization's leaders on young Muslims. The internet and the electronic media serve as a central platform for the recruitment of activists to the Jihad organizations.

In addition, Bin Laden's call in the current audio tape to create new Jihad arenas should be emphasized, in light of the sensitive situation in Gaza, the beginning of Barak Obama's Presidency and the possible retreat of the American forces from Iraq - the developments in the Jihad arena in Iraq may affect the scope of the presence and activity of global Jihad entities in the countries surrounding Israel, as was the case in previous Jihad arenas, such as Afghanistan and Bosnia.