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Dr. Michael Barak
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The alliance between the al-Qaeda leadership and the Iranian regime

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Abstract

This paper explores the evolving alliance between the Iranian regime and al-Qaeda, a relationship that has gained strength following the appointment of Sheikh Seif al-Adel as al-Qaeda's leader after the assassination of Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri. The paper examines the implications of this alliance for Israel, particularly in light of Seif al-Adel's call for a united Muslim front against the West and Israel, as articulated in his July 2024 article. Al-Adel's advocacy for Iran to lead this campaign, in collaboration with both Sunni and Shiite armed groups, marks a significant shift in al-Qaeda's strategy. The paper also addresses the potential consequences of this alliance, including Iran's enhanced ability to conduct terrorist attacks through al-Qaeda, and the risk of internal divisions within al-Qaeda due to its alignment with Iran. Ultimately, the paper argues that while this alliance may bolster Iran's capacity for aggression, it also threatens the cohesion and stability of al-Qaeda, potentially leading to its fragmentation.

Keywords: Sunni; Shiite; Iran; al-Qaeda; Sunni-Shiite Relations; Iran-al-Qaeda Alliance; Israel.

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The alliance between the Iranian regime and the al-Qaeda organization is not new and has been strengthening, especially since the end of 2022, following the appointment of Sheikh Seif al-Adel as the leader of the organization after the assassination of Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri. The nature of this alliance and its implications for Israel were discussed at the ICT international conference in September 2023¹ and in a document from December 2023². This alliance was further articulated on July 16, 2024, with the publication of an article by Sheikh Seif al-Adel, the leader of al-Qaeda, emphasizing the importance of establishing alliances among all armed Muslim nations and their involvement in a major campaign against the West and Israel, particularly in light of the war in Gaza. According to him, the campaign in Gaza represents an ongoing existential

1 Michael Barak, "Ramifications of Iran and al-Qaeda's New Leadership on Israel" ICT's 22nd World Summit, September 12, 2024.

2 See Michael Barak & Eitan Azani, 'Iran and al-Qaeda Under Sheikh Saif al-Adel', ICT, December 2, 2023. <https://ict.org.il/iran-and-al-qaeda-under-sheikh-saif-al-adel/>

and religious struggle against all Muslims, within which the Western-Zionist alliance aims to dominate the world, starting with the Muslim world and then extending to the pagan world. Therefore, al-Adel argues that it is preferable to entrust the long-term management of the campaign against the enemy to “the party with the greatest ability to acquire friends rather than make enemies, and with the capacity to build strong alliances with political wisdom and neutralize other opponents.” In other words, al-Adel implies that Iran should lead the battle against Israel in cooperation with armed Sunni and Shiite organizations.

The article published by Al-Adel is the fourth in a series of articles under the title “This is Gaza... a war of existence not a war of borders”. The series began to be published in May 2024. This is the first time that Sif Al-Adel publishes the article under his real name alongside revealing the pen names he used in his articles in previous years.³

The article published by Al-Adel is the fourth in a series titled “This is Gaza... a War of Existence, Not a War of Borders.” The series began publication in May 2024. This is the first time that Sif Al-Adel has published an article under his real name, while also revealing the pen names he used in his articles in previous years.

In the fourth article of the series, Al-Adel calls on Muslims to impose a boycott on Western products and advises on how to address the threat of UAVs. For example, he suggests kidnapping UAV operators, assassinating the technicians responsible for their production, or infiltrating UAV storage locations to destroy them. He even recommends sharing information among fighters in the jihad theaters that could assist in the production of UAVs. Additionally, Seif Al-Adel encourages the development of hacking capabilities to disrupt the navigation systems of missiles and drones.

Alongside this, he advocates for actions to disable critical infrastructure systems such as electricity, water, and transportation; to damage nuclear facilities and economic institutions in the West; and to promote assassinations, ambushes, bomb planting, and suicide attacks (for strategic purposes) on enemy territories. Al-Adel encourages candidates for conscription in Muslim countries to gather intelligence during their military service and identify weak points that could aid in future conflicts against these armies. He also calls for the elimination of military officers and the disruption of Zionist societies in enemy lands to reduce Western support for Jews. Meanwhile, Sif Al-Adel promotes the large-scale arming of Muslims and the storage of ammunition in hidden locations, all aimed at achieving victory in the campaign against Israel and Western countries.

3 At the end of the article, Seif al-Adel published all the pen names he used in his publications over the past years: Hazem al-Madani, Abir al-Sabeel, Muhnid Salem, Abu Khaled al-Sanaani, Muhammad Salah Abd al-Halim Zaydan, Salem Al-Sharif, “This is Gaza... a War of Existence, not a War of Borders (part 4)”, al-Sahab Media Foundation, July 16, 2024, p. 17.



The Cover Page of Sheikh Seif al-Adel's article 'This is Gaza... a War of Existence... not a Border War'

Al-Adel's willingness to establish an alliance with armed Shiite forces, led by Iran (although this is not stated explicitly, but rather alluded to), has several consequences and implications, most of which were addressed in the 2023 document:

1. The deepening of Iran's capabilities to carry out terrorist attacks against Western and Israeli targets, and to launder these activities through the Al-Qaeda organization, is evident. An example of this was observed as early as November 2022, in the context of a failed assassination attempt on Israeli businessman Itzik Moshe in Georgia, conducted by a member of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Al-Qaeda members of Pakistani origin.
2. The erosion of Seif al-Adel's position in the eyes of his fellow leaders and other al-Qaeda affiliates may lead to deny loyalty to his leadership and potentially result in a break from the parent organization. This is due to their aversion to being connected with Iran and the fear that al-Qaeda could be transformed into a tool for advancing the Iranian agenda in the region. According to al-Qaeda's regulations, the organization's leader must remain on the soil of Afghanistan or within one of the organization's branches, rather than in Shiite Iran, which is remembered for its history of violence against Sunnis. The presence of Seif al-Adel, his family members, and his father-in-law Mostafa Hamid—a former member of al-Qaeda who has become a spokesperson for Iran—on Iranian soil contradicts al-Qaeda's regulations and may encourage separatist tendencies and rebellion within the ranks of al-Qaeda.

In conclusion, the alliance between al-Qaeda and the Iranian regime, according to Seif al-Adel, is a necessary strategic measure for building an effective Islamic force capable of waging a war of attrition against Israel and the West. While this alliance may pose negative consequences for Israel's security, particularly regarding the potential for Iran to utilize al-Qaeda networks to execute terrorist attacks against Israel, it simultaneously encourages the disintegration of al-Qaeda and fosters divisions within the organization due to a reluctance to align with Iran.