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# Article

## Terrorism: Bin Ladin Statement Latest Effort To Publicly Recast Iraq Jihad [redacted]

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OFFICE OF TERRORISM ANALYSIS

**Usama Bin Ladin's 21 March statement criticizing Palestinian leaders for abandoning jihad likely reflects [redacted] al-Qa'ida leaders' mounting attempts to publicly deflect attention from their lagging Iraq jihad.** Bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri since late last year have been deemphasizing tactical battleground ups and downs in Iraq by highlighting in propaganda that the jihad there is part of a larger, long-term regional struggle that will lead to the eventual "liberation" of Jerusalem—a message al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) recently echoed through its political front group the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). Bin Ladin uses his latest statement to remind Palestinians and other Muslims that it is their religious duty to wage jihad against "illegitimate" regional governments, a less acrimonious approach than that used last month by the notional ISI leader Abu Umar al-Baghdadi—who openly implied HAMAS leaders are apostates—but nonetheless reflecting a similar sentiment.

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- Bin Ladin's 11-minute statement reiterated al-Qa'ida's Levant narrative: that jihad, not political engagement, is the only way to "liberate" Palestine and that local apostate governments are complicit in the "siege" of the Gaza Strip.
- We judge al-Qa'ida will increasingly rely on this approach to both rally and assuage followers that success or failure in Iraq—which they have made a central part of their global insurgency—cannot be measured through immediate developments in the theater.

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[redacted] This statement—issued a day after the fifth anniversary of the start of the Iraq war—couples success in Iraq with the future success of a regional jihad to reclaim "Palestine." The statement also may be a further attempt to appease critics who have questioned al-Qa'ida's sincerity in only recently seeking direct involvement in Palestinian issues, by underscoring that Iraq has always been the first step to expanding al-Qa'ida's jihad westward.

- Bin Ladin reiterated in this and his 29 December 2007 statement that Iraq is the closest jihad to "Palestine" and that after their victory in Iraq, mujahidin brigades will march from Iraq to reclaim Israeli-occupied territory.

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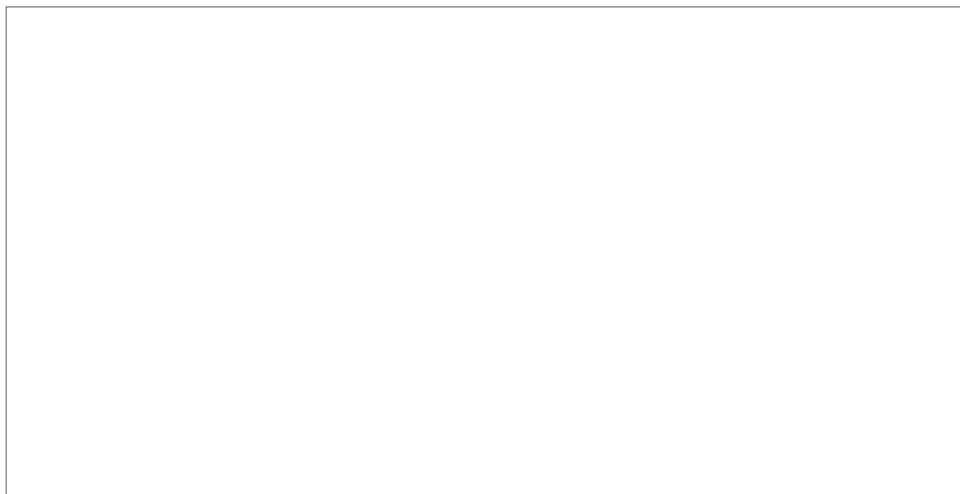
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***Bin Ladin's statement—which is clearly directed at HAMAS as well as Fatah leaders—also is likely an attempt to subtly weigh in on a recent pointed propaganda exchange between AQI and HAMAS.*** Bin Ladin's statement suggests he is seeking to present a united ideological front with AQI by criticizing HAMAS, but stops short of explicitly chastising HAMAS, which has considerable political and ideological sway in the region.

- Al-Qa'ida's propaganda toward HAMAS, including Bin Ladin's statement this week, has chided the group for its political engagement, but stayed relatively conciliatory by offering its leadership a chance to return to the "correct" path of jihad. Bin Ladin in his December public statement called on the group to "correct its course" and Zawahiri in a 10 July 2007 statement urged HAMAS to embrace a "new opportunity" to disengage from domestic and international agreements and cooperate with other mujahidin to reestablish the Caliphate.
- Abu Umar in mid-February took a more confrontational approach when he publicly denounced HAMAS and outlined eight instances of its leaders' betrayal. HAMAS responded by publicly criticizing Abu Umar for his group's "fascistic takfiri bloody and extremist project" and brutal tactics, vowing that the door is permanently closed for his followers to enter Palestine.
- Al-Qa'ida leaders were undoubtedly concerned that this exchange, if not quickly defused, could lead to a distracting or even counterproductive intra-Sunni rhetorical conflict. Al-Qa'ida leaders have avoided calling HAMAS apostates—a charge punishable by death—and will likely seek to further clarify the group's position in future statements. [REDACTED]

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