



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on May 18, 2011

Interim Caretaker Chosen to Lead Al-Qaeda

Now that America's decade-long hunt for Osama bin Laden is over, al-Qaeda's hunt to replace him is just beginning. Several names have been suggested as competitors for the helm of al-Qaeda. The problem faced by all of them, however, is inherent in the structure of the organization itself. As described by al-Qaeda insider Khalid al-Hammadi, al-Qaeda's modus operandi is "centralization of decision and decentralization of execution." This purposeful fracturing of command and control infrastructure makes consolidation of power very difficult.



News [outlets reported](#) Tuesday that Saif al-Adel (left) has been appointed to serve as an interim caretaker for global al-Qaeda operations and resources. Adel, whose actual name is believed to be Omar al-Sumali, is an Egyptian who gained notoriety for his role in the strategic planning and execution of the 1988 U.S. embassy bombings in Africa. He is currently under [indictment](#) for his role in the bombings, although the 9/11 [report](#) indicates that he opposed the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Adel is assumed to be a senior al Qaeda military commander who had a close working relationship with Osama bin Laden. Pentagon intelligence [documents](#) suggest that Saif al-Adel's role in the organization has been as a trainer, military leader, and key member of bin Laden's security detail.

It is unknown if Adel will ever lose the "interim" designation and take over permanent control of al-Qaeda. Regardless, the biggest obstacle in the path of anyone hoping to assume the leadership role left vacant by Osama bin Laden is the far-flung dispersion of the various al-Qaeda affiliates. Among the known global branches of the larger Al-Qaeda network there is al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb, Al-Shabaab, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement.

From one of these franchises a new boss will be selected. He will need to be battle-proven, as well as capable of keeping the pipeline of funds open and flowing with the cash necessary to fund a worldwide jihad against the West. For now, the man who most fully fits the bill is Ayman al Zawahiri.

Zawahiri is generally considered to be the number two man at Al-Qaeda and the most obvious choice to step into the empty leadership slot. He is an Egyptian who has reportedly acted as bin Laden's right-hand man since the early days of al-Qaeda's formation. The rank and file of the greater al-Qaeda operation probably supports Zawahiri and the former Egyptian Army surgeon counts many of his backers among the core of al-Qaeda's most dedicated followers.

Despite his indisputable al-Qaeda bona fides, Zawahiri's ascension to the throne of terror is hampered by published [speculation](#) that he sold out his former boss to the American intelligence community operating in Pakistan. Although unverified, the mere rumor of such a betrayal is enough to prompt some among the al-Qaeda faithful to look elsewhere for their marching orders.



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Another name percolating to the surface is Abu Yahya al Libi. Libi is considered an intractable ideologue, fanatically committed to the jihad against the West. He is renowned among al-Qaeda members for his escape from Bagram prison in Afghanistan in 2005.

A figure often mentioned in the discussion of future heads of al-Qaeda is the American-born radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaki. Awlaki has the appeal of being fluent in English (he was born in New Mexico), as well as being adept at manipulating social media and the Internet to foment his own brand of Islam. Awlaki is accused of being the principal inspiration of Nalik Hasan, the Ft. Hood shooter and Umar Abdulmutallab, the Nigerian man who tried to take down a passenger jet over Detroit by hiding explosives in his underwear.

There are a couple of problems that could prevent Awlaki from assuming command of the worldwide al-Qaeda conglomerate, however. First, he is currently on the run and is regularly the target of unmanned drone missile attacks on his suspected hideout in the mountains of Yemen. And, being an American, albeit one of Yemeni descent, he is probably viewed with suspicion by many of al-Qaeda's influential membership.

Whoever emerges as the new face of al-Qaeda, there is little doubt that the government of the United States will continue to prop up the alleged "enemy of the state," using the threat of danger to "the homeland" as a pretext for the diminution of liberty and the enlargement of the permitted role of government oversight and control over every aspect of the lives of all Americans. These violations of the Constitution will be done under the cover of waging the "War on Terror" and keeping America safe from another 9/11.

Photo: Saif al-Adel: AP Images



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