

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Global Reactions Vary After Death of Al-Qaeda Leader Al-Zawahiri

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OE Watch Commentary

The announcement on 1 August 2022 that the United States had killed the longtime leader of Al-Qaeda, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, as he stood on a balcony in Kabul, Afghanistan, was celebrated around the world. While U.S.-based scholars and analysts have debated what the killing of Zawahiri means for Al-Qaeda, the international Salafi-jihadist movement, and the U.S. role in the world, so too have commentators from around the world offered their own, local perspectives on the implications of Zawahiri's death. These range from assessing the ongoing strength of Al-Qaeda to lamenting the empowerment of brutal indigenous leaders and governments.

Writers hailing from more powerful global states have shown broadly similar concerns as U.S. commentators. In France, noted analyst Wassim Nasr stated in the private, left-leaning French outlet *L'Opinion* that from his perspective, even after Zawahiri's death, "Al-Qaeda Central is now more powerful than during the Bin Laden era." Similarly, in Australia, commentary from the centrist *Australian Institute of International Affairs* argued that the death of Zawahiri in no way significantly weakened Al-Qaeda. The author likewise cautioned that as the world begins to give attention to right-wing extremism, the threats posed by Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State remain real and should not be ignored. In contrast, in India, a writer in the Hindi-language daily *Dainik Jagran* argued that Zawahiri's death was a "huge setback" for Al-Qaeda, especially in its attempts to grow

its presence in the subcontinent. However, he worried that disenchanted members of Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, might drift towards the Islamic State in Khorasan province.

Other commentators writing from less powerful states around the world underscored the link between Zawahiri's killing and their own local political and security situations. For instance, in Nigeria, an article in the major newspaper *Daily Trust* quotes a former Nigerian Minister of Aviation as lamenting: "The Americans killed Osama Bin Laden, Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi and now Ayman Al Zawahiri. Kudos! In Nigeria we do not kill terrorists: we beg them, pay them, appease them, reward them, bow before them, and give them chieftaincy titles." In Rwanda's private but state-supportive *New Times*, authors critiqued the current U.S. Secretary of State for hailing the death of Zawahiri while also recently criticizing Rwanda's detention of U.S. citizen Paul Rusesabagina, who has been convicted by Rwandan courts as being a terrorist. As they wrote: "If the US has the right to kill a foreign national using 'transnational repression,' then Rwanda... has the right to bring to justice to Rusesabagina, a Rwandan citizen." In sum, whether interpreted globally or more locally, the impact of Zawahiri's death has elicited concerns regarding the continuation of Al-Qaeda and the empowerment of brutality by individual leaders and governments.

Source: Pascal Airault, "Al-Qaïda est plus forte qu'à l'époque de Ben Laden (Al-Qaeda is stronger than in Bin Laden's era)," *L'Opinion* (private French daily), 2 August 2022. <https://www.lopinion.fr/international/al-qaida-est-plus-fort-qua-lepoque-de-ben-laden>

Al-Qaeda central is stronger than in the era of Bin Laden. It's difficult to evaluate the number of its member even if certain experts talk of tens of thousands of them. The organization is well-anchored in Afghanistan, with the ability to raise money, give directives, and assure international communications.

Source: Michael Zekulin, "Al-Zawahiri's Death and its Impact on the Future of Al-Qaeda," *Australian Institute of International Affairs* (Australian think tank), 11 August 2022. <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/al-zawahiris-death-and-its-impact-on-the-future-of-al-qaeda/>

News that a US drone strike killed al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri created a myriad of reactions... But what should we make of this event? Is it as consequential as some believe? One thing we know for certain is it would be a mistake to believe this is the death knell of al-Qaeda...

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Continued: Global Reactions Vary After Death of Al-Qaeda Leader Al-Zawahiri

Source Continued: Michael Zekulin, “Al-Zawahiri’s Death and its Impact on the Future of Al-Qaeda,” *Australian Institute of International Affairs* (Australian think tank), 11 August 2022. <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/al-zawahiris-death-and-its-impact-on-the-future-of-al-qaeda/>

Is this the end of al-Qaeda? This is highly unlikely. In addition to what the group has become, we must also remember that more than anything, these are belief communities which persist despite the loss of any one member, ever senior leadership. The group survived Osama bin Laden’s death in 2011... Despite the current resurgence and focus on right-wing-inspired extremism and terrorism, the West should not neglect the threat posed by Islamist-inspired terrorism.

Source: Aalok Sensharma, “How Ayman Al-Zawahiri’s Death with Will Impact Al-Qaeda in India Explained,” *Jagran English* (private Indian daily), 3 August 2022. <https://english.jagran.com/india/how-ayman-al-zawahiri-s-death-will-impact-al-qaeda-in-india-explained-10046883>

Al-Zawahiri’s death is a huge setback for Qaeda, which has been trying to establish itself following the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). His death will also impact the group’s position in India, where it has been trying to spread its wings.... His killing will affect the morale of Qaeda supporters and cadres in India... An imminent concern for India is the fact that disenchanted Al-Qaeda cadres must shift their allegiance to the Islamic State and its regional affiliate Islamic State–Khorasan (ISKP).

Source: Adedamola Quasiam, “Nigeria Rewards Terrorists Instead of Killing Them, Fani-Kayode Reacts to Death of Al-Qaeda Leader,” *Daily Trust* (private Nigerian daily), 2 August 2022. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202208030105.html>

A former Minister of Aviation, Chief Femi Fani-Kayode, has reacted to the killing of Al-Qaeda leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, by a United States drone strike. However, he alleged that terror kingpins in Nigeria are rewarded instead of being killed.

“The Americans killed Osama Bin Ladin, Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi & now Ayman Al Zawahiri. Kudos! In Nigeria we do not kill terrorists: we beg them, pay them, appease them, reward them, bow before them, give them chieftaincy titles & let them break into prison to free their brothers,” he tweeted.

Source: James Karuhanga, “Open Letter to Blinken: Scholars call for partnerships ‘free of condescending positions’,” *New Times* (private Rwandan English language daily), 9 August 2022. <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/open-letter-blinken-scholars-call-partnership-free-condescending-positions>

When announcing his visit to Rwanda, the signatories remind Blinken that he referred to “the wrongful detention of the U.S. Lawful Permanent Resident Paul Rusesabagina.”

Rusesabagina created the National Liberation Front (FLN), a criminal organization that served as an armed wing of his Rwandan Movement for Democratic Change (MRDC). On September 20, 2021, the High Court Chamber for International and Cross Border Crimes handed a 25-year sentence to Rusesabagina, for terrorism. The FLN orchestrated murders in south-western Rwanda between 2018 and 2019.

The authors of the open letter note that on August 2, Blinken celebrated the death of Al-Zawahiri with the following words: “We have delivered on our commitment to act against terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan. The world is safer following the death of al-Qa’ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. The U.S. will continue to act against those who threaten our country, our people, or our allies.”

If the US has the right to kill a foreign national using “transnational repression,” then Rwanda certainly has the right to bring to justice Rusesabagina, a Rwandan citizen, at the root of an armed group responsible for the deaths of Rwandan civilians in Rwanda, they pointed out.