



Report 11-015
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PROPRIETARY CLASSIFICATION: BUSINESS-IN-CONFIDENCE

FLASH: ASSAD REGIME KILLS 250 IN 2 DAYS

Sensing Stalemate on Western Intervention, a Possible Al Qaeda Infiltration

Forces of Bashar Al-Assad have killed as many as 250 over the last 48 hours, reported the SYRIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL (SNC) today. Privately, rebel sources have told *INSIDER* the death toll from “the Christmas Massacre” may be much higher. Dissidents continue to find the bodies of victims in the wreckage, some headless ([YOUTUBE 00:24, extremely graphic](#)), others found in pieces ([YOUTUBE 00:36, extremely graphic](#)).

Assad’s forces struck two areas: Jabal Al-Zawiyeih, a mountainous region in northwestern Idlib (the province bordering Turkey), and Homs, the flashpoint city that lies along the Orontes River, the valley we’ve dubbed the rebel corridor.¹ Al-Zawiyeih is about 6 miles southeast of the town of Jisr Al-Shughour on the Orontes, [shown on this map](#). In September, we received an unconfirmed report from a source that Zawiyeih was serving as a command-and-control center for Syrian dissidents, and that accounts for the high percentage of defectors killed there in the past 2 days. With such a dispersed and loosely organized FREE SYRIA ARMY, however, a “center” could plausibly be the outskirts of any village.² Or, for that matter, any residence:



Suspecting that an activist was hiding in a home in Al-Zawiyeih, regime forces torched it, destroying the residence and burning occupants alive. ([YOUTUBE 01:03](#))

Sources say thousands of people in Zawiyeih fled their homes and bolted for olive groves when the Syrian Army attacked. **The assaults were as personal as they were gruesome:** for example, regime forces did not merely shoot and kill Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fateh, imam at a Zawiyeih mosque, but decapitated him post-mortem and hung his head above the door of his mosque. At 0729 EST, regime was moving massive numbers of dissidents into military prisons (the ARAB LEAGUE protocol does not authorize monitors access to military prisons).

¹ “Flash: Northwestern Syrian Town Braces for Massacre Reminiscent of Hama Massacre of 1982.” *FORWARD-LEARNING INSIDER* 11-070 8 June 2011.

² “Syrian Dissidents Make their 1st Call for Intervention.” *FORWARD-LEARNING INSIDER* 11-115 8 September 2011.

The massacre is Assad's prelude to the arrival Thursday of the advance team of monitors called for by the ARAB LEAGUE agreement that was signed by Damascus Monday after innumerable delays and deadline extensions. Heading the delegation of monitors is a general from Sudan, the regime ally that voted against sanctions imposed on Syria by the ARAB LEAGUE.

The SNC called on the U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL to declare Homs and Idlib disaster areas and establish "safe zones" around them to "protect Syrian civilians:"

Take all necessary actions to stop the bloody campaign ... spreading to more towns through the regime's militant expansion ... Zawiye mountain [in] Idlib and Homs [should be declared] disaster areas exposed to large-scale genocide and displacement operations by the Syrian regime's militias.

The Christmas Massacre comes after 55 foreign policy experts of every political stripe signed an **open letter** to President Obama to "show leadership" and take "immediate actions to bring an end to Assad's brutality." Among other initiatives, the letter urges the administration to (*emphasis added*):

Work with Turkey and other partners to establish safe havens in Syria, as well as no-go zones for the Assad regime's security forces to protect civilians.



A little creative lobbying by the Syrian opposition at a 16 December protest in Idlib (YOUTUBE 01:03).

Citing Western intelligence sources, the Israeli daily HA'ARETZ reported today that more than 10,000 soldiers defected from the Syrian Army, and only half the conscripts recalled to active duty are reporting in the latest call-ups.

As word of the Christmas Massacre seeped out of Syria, exiled freedom advocate Ammar Abdulhamid of Silver Spring, Maryland, put it best: "Assad is not conceding but escalating." The how and why of an intervention grows more complex by the hour and may have been exacerbated today by the prospect of an incursion by AL QAEDA.

• **POSSIBLE AL QAEDA INFILTRATION.** There is chatter that AL QAEDA operatives, claiming they are Assad opposition fighters, may be entering Syria from Aarsal (or Irsal), a border town in northeastern Lebanon that lies near the Orontes River about 40 miles southwest of Homs as shown on this map. Scene of both Syrian Army incursions, opposition weapons smuggling and support centers for

defectors, the borderland has been highly unstable.³ We've judged that Damascus could use weapons smuggling and the harboring of defectors as pretext to roll over Lebanon, in keeping with Assad's pledge that any violence injected into Syria by "foreign instigators" would in turn be injected throughout the Middle East.⁴

The suspected operatives could be mere weapons smugglers, as the Lebanese defense ministry has suggested, or they could be genuine operatives, likely associated with AL QAEDA IN THE LEVANT.⁵ If so, this would be the first time AL QAEDA insinuated itself directly in an Arab-Spring-inspired revolt. (As a cautionary note, it should be born in mind that the Assad regime routinely characterizes its opposition as "armed terrorists" and alternately members of the MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD or AL QAEDA. That raises the possibility that the buzz may stem from an Assad propaganda stream, but it bears watching because of its mention of a specific point of origin.)



In Turkey, a defector Syrian Army captain who calls himself *Abu Mujaidin* (center) called for international intervention. "We are ... demanding a buffer zone [meaning a No-Fly Zone]. If we got this, it would give us aerial cover. With aerial cover, we'll be able to liberate our country." (Grab from this AL JAZEERA video.)

An AQIL infiltration would resonate with AL QAEDA's desire to engage more aggressively with the Arab Spring. That is a policy initiative of Muhammad Ibrahim Makkawi – better known by his nom de guerre, *Sayf Al-'Adl* ("Sword of Justice"), head of the military council of AL QAEDA. **It would also make sense in light of *Al-Adl*'s strong ties with Iran and his years of work with HEZBOLLAH.**⁷

The former Egyptian Army colonel had focused for many years on assembling militant networks across a vast front from Af-Pak, Iran, Iraq, the Caucasus, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Israel, called "Triangle of Horror" by Abdel Bari Atwan in *THE SECRET HISTORY OF AL QAEDA*. His near-obsession with building these "brigades" was the result of *Al-Adl*'s commitment to resilience and long-term growth, a

³ "Weapons & Warriors" under "Syrian Defectors: The Regime is in Trouble, So is the Region." *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 11-163 18 November 2011.

⁴ "*Special Report*: Syria's Arab Spring & The Return of Political Terror in Lebanon." *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 11-075 24 June 2011.

⁵ AL QAEDA's primary unit in the Levant is the MARTYR ABDULLAH AZZAM BRIGADE. It operates in Gaza, Jordan and Israel and has a commanding presence in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Rightly called (but not self-identified as) AL QAEDA IN THE LEVANT (AQIL), the group is violently opposed to the Lebanese government, the U.N. INTERIM FORCE IN LEBANON (UNIFIL) and absolutely vicious toward Assad's lapdog, HEZBOLLAH. AQIL is led by Saleh bin Abdullah *Al-Qaarawi* (often *Qaarawi*) – and it's safe to presume Osama bin Laden had great faith in a man he selected to command the brigade he named after Azzam, his revered spiritual mentor (even though bin Laden likely ordered Azzam assassinated). *Al-Qaarawi* has one overriding mission: recapture AL AQSA MOSQUE in Jerusalem. *Al-Qaarawi* rules over a half-dozen AQ affiliates or aspirants in the Levant. They include the ABU ALI MUSTAFA BRIGADES (militant arm of the POPULAR FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF PALESTINE, an AQ aspirant, and JAISH AL-UMMAH ("ARMY OF THE NATION") and many others. He also oversees JAISH AL-QUDS AL-ISLAMI (JQI) (ISLAMIC ARMY OF AL QUDS). JQI broke off from HAMAS when it attacked and killed Sheikh Abdel-Latif Moussa and his followers in the Gaza terrorist group JUND ANSAR ALLAH ("SOLDIERS OF THE COMPANIONS OF GOD"). That attack prompted AL QAEDA to declare war on HAMAS (*FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 09-163 15 August 2009). *Al-Qaarawi* also oversees FATEH (OR FATAH) AL-ISLAMI ("ISLAMIC CONQUEST"), another AQ-created group whose name is in keeping with the grand, boastful *Jihadi* vision of world domination. "*Flash*: Rumors of War – Ahmadinejad Walks on Lebanese Soil." *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 10-142 13 October 2010.

⁶ "*Special Report*: AL QAEDA's New War of Attrition & Its New Operational Commander." *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 10-160 13 November 2010. See also:

"*More Insidious*: A Siddiqui-related Threat by Charismatic AL QAEDA Prime Leader." *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 10-176 10 December 2010.

⁷ *Al-Adl* has strong, historic ties to Iranian intelligence and his work with HEZBOLLAH in Lebanon dates back to the 1990s. Those ties are perhaps the strongest argument in favor of the "deadly alliance" between Shiite and Sunni militants advanced by Con Coughlin in his must-read volume, *KHOMEINI'S GHOST*. *Al-Adl* was coddled by Iran for 8 years before his "release" last year from "house" arrest. Make that "beach-house arrest." Iran put him up on the Caspian Sea coast with wife and kids. **While "imprisoned" in Iran, *Al-Adl* masterminded and directed the Riyadh bombings of May 2003.** "*Al-Adl*: Leader in Forging the 'Deadly Alliance' Between AL QAEDA & Shiite Khomeinism." *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 11-063 19 May 2011.

principle he called التنفس في طويلة (“long-breathing”).⁸ Important in this context: as he was raising up his networks, *Al-Adl* became immersed in the nascent Arab Spring and by late 2010 was personally challenging the way Osama bin Laden and the AL QAEDA SHURA were dealing with the emerging movement. He ultimately convinced AL QAEDA to engage and exploit the movement. After the OBL take-down in May, we observed:

It just made sense to *Al-Adl* to nurture ties with the Arab Spring, as a *coup* in Cairo or Sana'a would serve AQ's interests. Besides, he reasoned, failure to engage the grassroots all but invited the West to intrude, isolate and marginalize AL QAEDA.

It may be the West that is being isolated and marginalized. If genuine and more than a matter of gun-running, the AL QAEDA infiltration was likely prompted by the vacuum created by the international community's persistent stalemate on the questions of intervention and the establishment of “no-go” or “safe zones” in-country. AL QAEDA may have seen and seized an opportunity to “intrude.”



An EA-18G Growler electronic warfare aircraft takes off after a transient stop in Souda Bay, Crete, yesterday. Five Growlers with the YELLOW JACKETS of ELECTRONIC ATTACK SQUADRON ONE THREE EIGHT are heading home to NAVAL AIR STATION WHIDBEY ISLAND, Washington, following a 6-month deployment to Iraq. “Rampage,” the word on the tank, is the squadron’s call sign. (Public domain photo by Paul Farley)

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⁸ ^ *Ibid.* (“Profile: Discipline, Deception & ‘Long-Breathing’ – AL QAEDA’s Acting Emir,” page 1.)