



# MILITANT LEADERSHIP MONITOR

## Personalities Behind the Insurgency

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### DRONE STRIKE KILLS 2008 EMBASSY ATTACKER ADNAN AL-QADHI NEAR SANAA

A drone strike on a car in a village less than 40 kilometers from the Yemeni capital, Sanaa on November 6, killed Adnan al-Qadhi and injured or killed two other men with him, Rabee Laheb and Redwan al-Hashidi (Xinhua, November 7). Before becoming an al-Qaeda operative in the mid-2000s, al-Qadhi was a lieutenant colonel in the Yemeni army and commanded a brigade in al-Makha led by the retired General Saleh al-Dani, who currently leads an anti-government militia with Major General Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar. Al-Qadhi, al-Dani and Ali Muhsin all come from the village of Sanahan, which is where former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh also comes from. [1]

Adnan al-Qadhi was arrested in 2008 with Arif al-Qadhi for their involvement in the 2008 U.S. embassy attack in Sanaa in which six attackers, six Yemeni police, and seven civilians were killed (al-Jazeera, September 18, 2008). However, both of them were secretly released from prison because of the influence of their fathers and the sympathy of General Ali Muhsin. Adnan al-Qadhi never relinquished his al-Qaeda affiliation despite his release from prison, however, and was recently reported to have raised the al-Qaeda flag over his home in Beit al-Ahmar. [2] Because of his government connections, he was chosen as a mediator between the government and the slain Shaykh Tarik al-Dhahab during the battle for Radaa in 2011.

Although some analysts doubt whether Adnan al-Qadhi was actively involved in planning operations against U.S. interests in Yemen at the time of his death on November 6, he had reportedly told a journalist friend of his that he believed the United States wants to see the re-separation of South Yemen from North Yemen and the establishment of a Shiite State in the northern part of what would be North Yemen. [3] Perhaps Adnan al-Qadhi, despite his al-Qaeda



Shaykh Ahmad Mouaz al-Khatib

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resume, evolved into a Yemeni nationalist and was no longer concerned with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) efforts to establish an emirate in Yemen's Abyan Province. Nonetheless, the drone strike shows that the United States did not allow his actions in 2008 to be forgotten. The drone strike, one day after the U.S. presidential election, also shows that President Obama's drone policy will continue in his second term.

Notes:

- [1] Author's interview with journalist Nasser Arrabyee, November 8.
- [2] Ibid.
- [3] Ibid.

## ABU MANSUR AL-AMRIKI AND RADULLAN SAHIRON ADDED TO FBI MOST WANTED LIST

The 28-year old Alabama native and al-Shabaab member Omar Hammami, also known as Abu Mansur al-Amriki, has been placed on the FBI Most Wanted List more than five years after first appearing on the FBI's radar when he entered Somalia in 2007. [1] Hammami fell out of favor with al-Shabaab leader Abdi Godane in 2011. In a one-minute video released in March entitled "urgent message," Hammami said he was "in danger because of differences" that occurred between al-Shabaab's leaders and him. [2] Al-Shabaab said at the time, however, through a Twitter posting that, "We assure our Muslim brothers that #AlAmriki is not endangered by the Mujahideen & our brother still enjoys all the privileges of brotherhood" and that "formal investigation is just underway." [3] Hammami, who also released an autobiography in May, detailing his upbringing in Alabama, became the 31st terrorist on the FBI Most Wanted List. [4] Apparently, the United States and al-Shabaab are both targeting him.

Also placed on the FBI Most Wanted List was Radullan Sahiron, one of the main leaders of Abu Sayyaf, which is based in Basilan, southern Mindanao, Philippines. Sahiron was also indicted in U.S. federal court in 2007 in connection with the kidnapping of an American citizen who was held hostage for 23 days on the island of Jolo. The State Department's Rewards for Justice Program also offers a reward of up to \$1 million for information leading to Sahiron's arrest (Inquirer, November 15). Most recently, on October 28, up to 100 of Sahiron's fighters engaged in a six-hour battle with Armed Forces of the Philippines' troops in a jungle near southern

Sulu province's mountainous Patikul town, but neither Sahiron nor any of the foreign hostages were among the fighters (AP, October 30). For the time being, Sahiron, like Hammami, remains at-large.

Notes:

- [1] See: <http://www.fbi.gov/mobile/press-releases/2012/omar-shafik-hammami-added-to-the-fbis-most-wanted-terrorists-list>.
- [2] See: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=GAr2srINqks](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=GAr2srINqks).
- [3] See: <https://twitter.com/HSMPress/status/181029361552588800>.
- [4] See: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/93732117/The-Story-of-an-American-Jihaadi>.

## A Glimpse of Talha Saeed: The Heir Apparent to Lashkar-e-Taiba

*Robert Stiles*

Talha Saeed is the son of one of India's most notorious terrorists, Hafiz Saeed. In recent years, Talha has emerged as his father's chief of propaganda and increasingly appears to be Hafiz's heir apparent. He has worked aggressively to promote his father (who had a \$10 million bounty placed on his head placed by the U.S. government) as a leader of global jihadist terrorism in the wake of Osama bin Laden's death (India Today, April 7). His father's terrorist network, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), is a sophisticated network that includes propaganda campaigns, logistical support networks and fundraising operations. This group carried out the July 2006 Mumbai train bombings and the November 2008 Mumbai attacks (Pakistan Business Recorder, August 31). Lashkar-e-Taiba also enjoys the de facto protection of the Pakistani government, which has yet to bring charges against Saeed. Islamabad views the terrorist group, much like the Taliban, as a "strategic asset" to use against India (The Hindu Business Line, September 26).

Hafiz Saeed is a cleric who emerged as a jihadist leader in the early 1990s with ample support from radical elements in the Pakistani military and Saudi Arabia. In 2002, when President Pervez Musharraf began making alliances with the West, Saeed reinvented himself as a charity leader while maintaining an active role in jihadist terror. Talha lived in

his father's shadow during his youth. However, Talha learned about jihadist terrorism from his family members, most notably his uncle Abdur Raham Makki. As Hafiz has moved closer to beginning a political career, Talha has assumed growing importance within the LeT's terrorist operations. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is likely to support any future efforts by Talha to take control of his father's terrorist organization. Doing so will allow the ISI to maintain leverage over the group (The Day After [New Delhi], June 16).

A confidante and major supporter of his father within the network, Talha has worked his way into the group's leadership. Under Makki's tutelage, he has assumed more responsibilities with the group's outreach program. However, his father never sent him on a mission, an issue that has created a rift between the Saeed family and other leading members of the LeT. After the 2008 bombings in Mumbai, Talha organized the group's propaganda campaign to deny any role in the attack. He was likely behind an open letter to the media in which Hafiz Saeed denied any role in the Mumbai attacks (India Today, April 7). Talha is also thought to be involved with the Jamaat-ul-Dawa and the offshoot Falah-e-Insaniat Foundation. His father created these organizations to get around a Pakistani ban against donations to his own organization. Talha has made speeches and collected donations at mosques throughout the city of Lahore in recent years (India.com, September 1).

Talha's growing role was documented by Jubair Ahmad, an LeT operative recently sentenced for uploading a propaganda video onto YouTube. Ahmad and Talha were in contact with one another throughout September and October 2010, when Ahmad produced the video. During his trial, Ahmad revealed that they discussed everything from images, music and audio in the video. The recordings provide some insight into Talha's views on jihad, as they feature speakers praising and praying for jihadist fighters. The videos also highlighted crimes committed against Muslims to rationalize terrorism (India Today, April 7).

As shown by this episode, Talha has an active and hands-on role in crafting propaganda. In these videos, he has praised "martyrs" and argued in favor of jihad. While doing this, he avoids any reference to the Mumbai bombings, which would almost certainly force Islamabad to prosecute his father (India Today, April 7). His skill with social media played a major role in raising his stature within the LeT (The Day After, June 16). Thus, Talha has the potential to spread his father's rabidly anti-Hindu brand of Islam to a broader audience. In one speech, his father said, "There cannot be any peace while India remains intact. Cut them, cut them

so much that they kneel before you and ask for mercy" (Hindustan Times, April 4). Hafiz has also accused U.S. President Barack Obama of provoking a religious war with Muslims (Daily Times [Pakistan], September 27).

The LeT poses an ongoing threat to the stability of South Asia. In spite of serious blows dealt to global jihadist groups in the region (most notably the 2011 killing of Osama bin Laden), jihadist groups remain active and adaptable. These terrorists seek to derail any potential progress in Indian-Pakistani relations. Periodic outbreaks of violence in Kashmir and cross-border infiltration by jihadist groups pose a continuous threat to the Indian government (Times of India, August 1). Furthermore, the U.S. government suspects that LeT will become increasingly active in Afghanistan as the scheduled drawdown of troops proceeds. The U.S. government has signaled that any groups that attack or disrupt NATO pipelines will be considered a legitimate military target (India Today, April 6). All these issues will almost certainly make Talha Saeed a significant militant leader of the near future.

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## Behind the Reign of Terror in Somalia: A Snapshot of Al-Shabaab leader Ahmad Abdi Godane

*Nathaniel Manni*

The failed state of Somalia is home to numerous clan-based and Islamist insurgent groups. However, none of these groups compare to Harakat al-Shabaab al-mujahideen—widely known as al-Shabaab—in size, sophistication or operational capability. Despite numerous attempts to eradicate the group, al-Shabaab continues to control large swaths of territory in both central and south Somalia. Although the Federal Republic of Somalia and its predecessor, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), have made progress in reducing the capability of the group, receiving assistance from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and neighboring states, al-Shabaab continues to remain a significant regional threat.

Ahmad Abdi Godane “Abu Zubayr” is behind the helm of al-Shabaab. Godane is a member of the Isaaq tribe, one of the dominant Somali clans which he is believed to still show favoritism toward. Godane was born on July, 10, 1977 in the Somaliland capital of Hargeisa. Later in life, Godane went on to study the Quran on a scholarship funded by wealthy Saudis at a *madrassa*, in Pakistan. Godane regularly traveled to Afghanistan during school breaks (Suna Times, October 1, 2010; Hiiran Online, April 18, 2010). During his time in Afghanistan Godane is believed to have received training from al-Qaeda, developing close ties within the organization and was indoctrinated into the group’s radical ideology, perhaps explaining his reason for merging al-Shabaab with al-Qaeda. In addition, Godane’s participation in the Afghan jihad gave him practical experience which has aided him in keeping his insurgency alive and well within Somalia.

Upon his return to Somalia in late 2001, Godane preached at the Abu-Bashir mosque, and worked at al-Barakaat, a company involved in *hawala* the informal money transfer system, which was placed on the UN terror list following 9/11, until February of this year, based on suspicions that the organization was aiding in the funding of terrorism (RBC Radio, June 7). Al-Barakaat and Godane are still included on U.S. Department of Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control, Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List.

In 2006, following the establishment of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), Godane served as Secretary General of the Executive Council of the ICU (Hiiraan Online, April 18, 2010). During this time Sharif Shaykh Ahmed—who later went on to serve as the President of Somalia’s TFG—was serving in the top leadership of the ICU. During the war with Ethiopia, which began in late 2006, Godane was wounded and subsequently returned to Somalia in February 2007 (Hiiraan Online, April 18, 2010).

Following the defeat of the ICU by the TFG and Ethiopian troops at the Battle of Jowhar, the ICU’s top leadership, Hassan Dahir Aweys, Sharif Shaykh Ahmed and Abdirahman Janaqow, accepted defeat, resigning from the ICU.

Many of the group’s more moderate members fled into exile in Eritrea and Djibouti after the surrender of the ICU. However, the hardline members, including Godane, vowed to continue fighting the TFG. Godane and Aden Hashi Farah Ayro went on to form al-Shabaab and Hassan Dahir Aweys formed Hizb al-Islam. These groups sought refuge in both south and western Somalia and continued to wage a campaign against the TFG, in many cases achieving victories and securing territories within these areas. However, despite the similar

ideological focus of these two organizations, they clashed from October 2009 to December 2010, with al-Shabaab—under the leadership of Godane—emerging victorious. During this time, Godane was wounded in an explosion (*Somaliland Times*, May 23, 2009; see Terrorism Monitor Brief, June 4, 2009). While it has not been confirmed, it is believed that Ibrahim Haji Jama was killed in a U.S. drone strike in December 2011. Possible confirmation of this may be the fact that Godane has served as leader of al-Shabaab since this time, and Ibrahim Haji Jama has not been seen since.

As the leader of al-Shabaab, Godane has shown his hardline stripes and has coordinated numerous attacks against various targets in Somalia. In addition, his decision to merge al-Shabaab with al-Qaeda—a group with a transnational agenda—shows that the group presents a clear threat to the West. A large number of al-Shabaab members live abroad and since al-Qaeda endorses attacks against the West, al-Shabaab members abroad may be used to conduct attacks against Western targets to help further al-Qaeda’s transnational agenda.

Godane has been described as reclusive, preferring to issue radio broadcasts rather than appear in interviews, but he has still managed to reach the masses with his messages. [1] Godane issued a speech on September 20, 2009, *Labayka Ya Usama* (Here I am at Your Service, Osama), in which he pledged loyalty to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. In an official statement that was subsequently issued in February 2012, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Godane announced that al-Shabaab had officially joined al-Qaeda. [2] Godane’s pledge of loyalty to al-Qaeda is troublesome not only because al-Qaeda has a transnational agenda, but also because we may see additional al-Shabaab participation in transnational terrorism. With a large Somali diaspora abroad, al-Shabaab may act as a variable extension of al-Qaeda, utilizing foreign sympathizers to conduct attacks against Western targets at behest of the organization. Also, with training and assistance from al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab will become capable of conducting increasingly deadly attacks both at home and abroad.

Godane released a pre-recorded message in June 2012 in which he vowed to continue fighting the Federal Government of Somalia and AMISOM until an Islamic caliphate is established throughout the Horn of Africa (Mareeg, June 18). Despite recent desertions and military setbacks—attributed to infighting within the organization, which in turn led to a hand of crushing defeats in battles with government forces—Godane still remains in charge of the organization. [3] While the future of al-Shabaab remains unclear, Godane

has maintained relative control over the organization, which continues to wage violent jihad within Somalia.

The United States has taken various steps to help eliminate Godane, including placing a \$7 million bounty on his head, and listing him as a Specially Designated National (RBC Radio, June 7). [4] In addition, the UN has placed sanctions on him as well under paragraph 8 of UNSC 1844. [5] Despite these measures, Godane remains at large and continues waging violent jihad in Somalia. Although Godane's short-term goal is the establishment of an Islamic caliphate across the Horn of Africa, his ambitions remain global.

*Nathaniel Manni is a U.S. Army veteran, who served three years active duty with the 82nd Airborne Division and four years in the Massachusetts National Guard. He has been published twice in the academic journal Global Security Studies and speaks both Russian and French.*

Notes:

[1] "Somalia: Understanding the Al-Shabaab/Al-Qaeda 'Merger,'" *allafrica.com*, March 19, 2012. Available at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201203191528.html?viewall=1>.

[2] See at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-myOT8CL84>.

[3] "Al-Shabaab leader vows for Islamic government," *Mareeg*, June 18, 2012. Available at: <http://www.mareeg.com/fidsan.php?sid=24672&tirsan=3>; "Al Shabaab suffer significant setback as over 200 militants disengage near Jowhar," September 22, 2012. Available at: <http://amisom-au.org/2012/09/al-shabaab-suffer-significant-setback-as-over-200-militants-disengage-near-jowhar/>.

[4] "Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List," U.S. Department of the Treasury Office Of Foreign Assets Control, November 20, 2012. Available at: <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/SDN-List/Pages/default.aspx>.

[5] "S/RES/1844 List of Individuals and Entities Subject to the Measures Imposed by Paragraphs 1, 3 and 7 of Security Council Resolution 1844 (2008)," United Nations Security Council, November 20, 2008. Available at: [www.un.org/sc/committees/751/pdf/1844\\_cons\\_list.pdf](http://www.un.org/sc/committees/751/pdf/1844_cons_list.pdf).

## **An In-Depth Portrait of Murat Karayilan, Field Commander of the PKK**

*Francesco F. Milan*

Murat Karayilan joined the separatist terrorist organization the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan – PKK) by the end of the 1970s. Right before the military coup that took place in September 1980 in Turkey, Karayilan was among the PKK militants that fled to Syria, where Hafez al-Assad's regime offered shelter and support to the organization. By 1998, the PKK faced a major crisis: the Syrian regime stopped providing any direct support to the organization and expelled Abdullah Ocalan, its founder and leader, from his safe house in Damascus. In the following months, Turkish authorities captured and imprisoned Ocalan, who called for the PKK's militants to withdraw from Turkey. In such a critical moment, Karayilan took over from the group's imprisoned leader, and managed to reorganize the PKK. Since then, while Abdullah Ocalan has maintained a cult-like ideological leadership over PKK members and sympathizers, and despite the internal divisions that recently emerged within the organization, Karayilan has been commonly acknowledged as the organization's operational leader.

Since 2003, the turmoil caused in Northern Iraq by Operation Iraqi Freedom gave Karayilan the opportunity to regroup and reorganize the PKK in the Qandil Mountains, located along the Iraqi-Iranian border. In 2005, senior PKK commanders elected Karayilan as president of the Executive Committee of the newly founded Democratic Confederation of Kurdistan (Koma Komalen Kurdistan – KKK), an organization that brought the PKK and other Kurdish groups under a single, unified structure. The KKK was dismantled in 2007, and substituted for the Peoples' Confederation of Kurdistan (Koma Civaken Kurdistan – KCK). Aimed at the implementation of "democratic confederalism," a stateless governing model conceived by Abdullah Ocalan, the KCK is still active as an umbrella transnational organization, which includes, among others, the PKK and its offshoot groups in Iraq, Iran, and Syria. While Ocalan is the KCK's honorary president, Karayilan has been confirmed as chairman of KCK's Executive Committee, the organization's main decision-making body; accordingly, the activities of the People's Defense Forces (Hezen Parastina Gel – HPG), the armed wing of KCK, also fall under his nominal authority.

However, at the moment the extent to which Karayilan is

fully in control of HPG operations is unclear. Last June, a Turkish military outpost located near Daglica, along the Turkish-Iraqi border, was attacked, and eight Turkish soldiers were killed. Karayilan claimed his organization was not responsible and put the blame for the attack on an unspecified local PKK unit gone rogue, but was later belied by a HPG senior operative, Duran Kalkan, who took full responsibility for the action (Today's Zaman, June 19; Star, July 6). On the other hand, Karayilan seem to be the mastermind behind the new strategy implemented by the organization's armed branch. As he explained in a recent interview, he wanted his militants to abandon the traditional hit-and-run tactics used against Turkish military forces for a new strategy based on three pillars he defined as "hit, hold, and control"—with the ultimate goal of "liberating" a number of Turkish rural villages located near the Iraqi border (al-Jazeera, October 13). The strategy was first applied last summer, when a large formation of armed militants engaged Turkish troops in the outskirts of Semdinli, a district located in the Hakkari province. Clashes started in late July and continued for almost three weeks, during which Turkey ended up deploying about 5,000 troops in the area. Although militants managed to take control of some areas and to set up improvised checkpoints for a short time, Turkish forces eventually regained the upper hand and pushed the militants back into northern Iraq. Nevertheless, Karayilan seemed positively impressed, albeit temporarily, by the results, albeit temporary, of the operation. In an interview he gave in August, Karayilan confirmed that "guerrillas want to expand their territory and fortify their positions" inside Turkey as a response to actions carried out by the Turkish military, which, he lamented, was "bombing villages and terrorizing our people every day" (Rudaw, August 9; Reuters, August 11).

From a political standpoint, Karayilan's leadership also shows an ambivalent nature, as it seems to be based on an allegiance to the PKK's, rather than the KCK's, cause. In his recent media appearances, he shows a tendency to overlook the impact that KCK militants might have in Syria, Iraq, and Iran in terms of potential political achievements, while focusing almost exclusively on Turkey. Even though he stressed how "the Turkish state and other occupiers [of Kurdistan] are doing all they can to prevent Kurds from benefiting from the redesigning and reshaping of the Middle East," he also downplayed the role that PKK (and, by extension, the KCK and its other subgroups) could potentially play in the region. He systematically refutes any active involvement of his organization in Syria, labeling such rumors as "Turkish propaganda" and also denies any agreement with Assad's regime. At the same time, Karayilan stresses how the PKK supports peace and democracy in the

region, while at the same time the organization "does not accept Turkish interference in Syria" (Rudaw, January 18; al-Jazeera, October 13).

This is not the first instance in which Karayilan seems to prioritize the PKK's Turkey-centric approach, and to overlook the KCK's transnational goals. Rumors concerning Iranian security forces capturing and then releasing Karayilan became widespread in August 2011, but such claims have remained either unconfirmed or openly denied by different state sources, both in Turkey and Iran (PressTV [Tehran], August 13, 2011; Today's Zaman, August 14, 2011). The circumstances of Karayilan's alleged capture and release have never been clarified, so little to no evidence is available to substantiate any claim. What remains indisputable is the fact that the PKK's Iranian offshoot, the so-called Free Life Party of Kurdistan (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê – PJAK), which was established in 2004, suddenly agreed to implement a ceasefire in September 2011. This raises a reasonable doubt with regard to the possibility that Karayilan reached an agreement with the Iranian regime during his alleged capture. Karayilan has always denied any allegation that tried to link him with Iran and, while confirming that PKK representatives have recently met with Iranian and Syrian officials, he defined the news about of capture as a "fabricated report" (al-Jazeera, October 13). However, PJAK seems to have simply disappeared from Iranian territory after an eight year-long struggle, and without having obtained any achievement whatsoever, just after Karayilan's alleged capture and subsequent release.

As the Syrian crisis unfolds, the shortcomings in Karayilan's leadership within the KCK have become more visible. He certainly showed he can play realpolitik—after all, he recently admitted that he sent some of his representatives to discuss with both the Iranian and the Syrian regime (al-Jazeera, October 13). Moreover, Turkish public opinion was caught by surprise when, in mid-2011, a leaked video showed that some senior PKK commanders had met with Turkish officials for secret negotiations and it later turned out this happened with Karayilan's consent. Murat Karayilan has led the PKK through the crisis it faced in the late 1990s and has been one of the key figures in the establishment of the KCK, an ambitious, transnational project for Kurdish self-rule. His leadership has to face a regional environment that is highly volatile in political terms, and focusing the organization's efforts on Turkey might be a necessary step to take in order to achieve some concrete results.

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## A Profile of Syrian Rebel Cleric Shaykh Ahmad Mouaz al-Khatib

*Dominic Kalms*

The National Coalition of the Syrian Revolutionary Forces and the Opposition elected Shaykh Ahmad Mouaz al-Khatib al-Husni, a little known moderate cleric (Imam), on November 11 to be their chief (al-Arab Online, November 12). While Khatib has asserted himself as a determined opposition leader, he has historically been persecuted by the Syrian government for his democratic messages and opposition to Assad's regime. Despite having similar grievances against the regime as the Muslim Brotherhood and Syrian National Council (SNC), Khatib has successfully maintained his independence, staying clear of Islamist parties and radical opposition groups (Middle East Online, November 12). As a result, he enjoys widespread support among independents in Syria, especially with the youthful opposition, who view him as a longtime reformer and activist (al-Jazeera, November 11). He also enjoys support among Western governments for his indefatigable calls for human rights and democratic governance reform. While the West may view Khatib as a moderate politician, he has also been described by several Arabic news outlets as an "independent Islamist" "Muslim cleric" and "progressive Islamist," and the true leanings of his political and religious thoughts remain somewhat of a mystery (Arab News, November 14).

### Background

Khatib was born in 1960 to Shaykh Mohammed Abu al-Faraj al-Khatib, a well-respected Sunni Sufi scholar from Damascus. Growing up, Khatib was greatly influenced by his father's sermons at the Umayyad Mosque and also formed much of his initial worldview from the teachings of his father's fellow Islamic preachers, Shaykh Hamdi al-Juwejati, Shaykh Abd al-Ghani al-Daqqar and Shaykh Abd al-Qader al-Arnaout (Arab News, November 14). While Khatib had a passion for Islamic jurisprudence, he chose to study geophysics at Damascus University, and upon graduation went to work for the al-Furat Petroleum Company (1985-91). After working for six years at the company, Khatib was awarded a prestigious position as the preacher of the Umayyad Mosque in 1992, yet he only remained at the Umayyad Mosque for two years, when Hafez al-Assad banned him from preaching as a result of his anti-regime sermons (al-Jazeera, November 12). Khatib took his message underground and subsequently ventured into several other teaching positions. Currently, Khatib holds the position of Professor of Islamic Dawa at the Tahzeeb Institute for Sharia Sciences (al-Jazeera, November

12).

In the 1980s and 1990s Khatib became involved in political Islam, and was well known for rallying against the Assad regime while calling for political pluralism, minority rights, governance reform—equality for the sexes—and an end to human rights abuses (al-Jazeera, November 12). When tension started to build in Syria in 2011 and protestors took to the streets against Assad, Khatib was one of the first mainstream figures in Syria to endorse the actions of the protestors. Just twenty days after the protests began, on March 15, 2011, Khatib appeared in the city of Douma at the funeral of an anti-government protestor killed by Syrian government forces and two days later Khatib attended another funeral for a protestor killed, in the suburb of Madimiyyah (al-Jazeera, November 12). As result of his actions, he was arrested four times by Syrian security forces between March 2011 and April 2012, which eventually prompted him to flee to Cairo to escape further persecution. During this time Khatib positioned himself as public critic of Assad and called "for a smooth transition of power," while simultaneously supporting the Syrian opposition fighters, including the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

### Khatib and the Free Syrian Army

While Khatib is not a member of the FSA, he is a prominent supporter of the group and has stated on numerous occasions that he believes the international community should send arms to the FSA to topple the Syrian regime and that the FSA would hold a future seat at the national coalition's governing table. He also refers to the killed rebels as freedom fighters and martyrs, and believes that the actions of the FSA cannot be judged through the same moral prism as the actions of the Syrian military. He states on his website that, "We are required to act peacefully and justly but... we cannot employ platonic idealism to judge those who risk their lives against a barbaric campaign" (Darbuna.com, November, 13). While Khatib is clearly a supporter of the FSA, he has criticized them in the past for committing mass violence, noting that they have caused foreign media outlets to portray the entire Syrian opposition as thuggish and uncivilized (Middle East Forum, November 14).

Moving forward, Khatib's greatest challenge will be his own national coalition's political makeup, which has caused a rift between his own ideology and that of the Muslim Brotherhood's, whose members make up a significant portion of the 60 member national coalition. As a result, a power split has been created within Khatib's coalition, with secularists and pro-democracy advocates on one side and the Muslim Brotherhood and hardcore Islamists on the

other side (*Lebanon's Daily Star*, November 13). Khatib's inability to create harmony and forge a unified path ahead has already led some to question his leadership abilities and many are now speculating that Khatib may be more of a "religious figure who is respected...and an interlocutor with outside powers, rather than a hands on leader" (*Lebanon's Daily Star*, November 13).

## Struggling to be a Leader

While Khatib is popular with the people of Damascus, he is seen as generally inexperienced, with little understanding of the nuances of governing and leadership, and such inexperience has shown as his national coalition is effectively split down the middle along religious lines (al-Jazeera, November 12).

Though Khatib struggles to maintain his leadership role, he will be an important figure in Syrian politics for years to come. While he remains an enigmatic leader, he does have certain unequivocal convictions. First, Khatib is willing to accept outside help, and has repeatedly called for foreign aid, from Arab and Western countries, to support the "almost completely liberated zones in Syria's northern cities of Aleppo, Idlib and Tal Abyad" (al-Jazeera, November 21). This would likely include NATO intervention to liberate the country and to enforce a no-fly zone. He has also stated on numerous occasions that he is not interested in negotiations with the Assad regime and that he believes Assad's allies, like Iran and Russia, are just buying time (Darbuna, November 16). Second, Khatib is a firm believer in minority rights and human rights in general; he believes in including the Alawites, Ismailis, Christians, Druze, Assyrians, Kurds, and other Syrian minorities in the future government and has repeatedly warned his followers not to emulate the brutal tactics of the Assad regime in battle. His great emphasis ending sectarianism in Syria has brought him many supporters over the years. In addition he has called for an end to retaliation against Alawites, stating that ordinary Alawite citizens are not responsible for Assad's brutal tactics. While he is a firm believer in Islam, he is also firm believer in meritocracy and has repeatedly denounced calls for an Islamic government run by clerics or politicians. He has stated that he wants to staff the future Syrian government with "technocrats." Lastly, he is an ardent critic of not only Assad but of all dictatorial leaders in the region, and was known as an outspoken critic of Hosni Mubarak and Saddam Hussein, although he did not support the Gulf War or the Iraq War. While Khatib's anti-dictatorship attitude may seem amiable to the United States, he extends his outrage to the West in the form of anti-imperialism, and he has routinely stated that the ultimate goal of the West is intervention, domination and supremacy.

Presently, most Western media outlets classify Khatib as a "moderate," yet he has a history of making anti-semitic, anti-western, and anti-Shia remarks, and his website has been described as "a brimming cloaca of anti-Semitic and anti-Shiite conspiracism" (*NOW Lebanon*, November 17). While Khatib does distinguish between Zionism, which he calls a "cancerous movement" and Judaism, which he says is a "religion greatly respected in Islam" he nonetheless states on his own website that one of Saddam Hussein's virtues is that he "built a formidable army and terrorized Jews" (al-Jazeera, December 19, 2006). In another post he goes on to state that Shias are "rejectionists" and talks about their ability to "establish lies" (Darbuna, December 23 2005).

## Conclusion

Ultimately, Khatib is a moderate Islamic pragmatist, who is a devout Sunni Sufi, but also is able to separate his Islamic views from political views. The general consensus seems to be that he is an ideological and political centrist. He is immensely popular in his home city of Damascus, and his tolerant attitude toward other religious sects in Syria is favored amongst his people. He is well educated and has a history of backing up his words with deeds; he was an early supporter of the protestors, and a longtime critic of Assad. Moving forward he is someone that the West can work with, while nonetheless remaining cautious about his ties to the FSA and other insurgent groups, which may have alternate agendas.

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