

Hamas Condemns bin Laden Killing

“We condemn the assassination and the killing of an Arab holy warrior. We ask God to offer him mercy with the true believers and the martyrs.” This was the reaction of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh to the killing of Osama bin Laden.

While Americans, Israelis and much of the rest of the world welcomed the death of the man who masterminded the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the United States which killed around 3,000 people, Hamas was plunged into sadness. The Iranian-backed terrorist group, whose official charter calls for the destruction of Israel, has fired 328 rockets and mortars at Israeli civilians so far this year.

Haniyeh, who acts as Prime Minister in the Gaza Strip, referred to bin Laden as a “spiritual leader” and equated his death with an “American policy based on oppression and bloodshed in the Muslim and Arab world.”

Hamas, which a few days ago announced a unification agreement with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas’ Fatah party, refuses to recognize Israel or enter into any peace negotiations with it.

Palestinian officials are scheduled to meet in Cairo on Wednesday to sign a reconciliation agreement and choose a new candidate for prime minister. Senior Hamas officials have already stated that the prime minister of the new unity government should come from Hamas-controlled Gaza.

Article seven of the Hamas charter states, “Muslims will fight the Jews (and kill them); until the Jews hide behind rocks and trees, which will cry: O Muslim! there is a Jew hiding behind me, come on and kill him!”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, however, called the targeting of bin Laden a “resounding victory for justice, freedom and the common values of all democracies that are resolutely fighting shoulder to shoulder against terrorism,” in a statement.

Other Israeli officials expressed concern that the death of bin Laden could provoke terror groups to retaliate.

Al-Qaeda has “infiltrated the Palestinian territories with help from Hamas,” Abbas confirmed in a 2008 interview.

“I can say without doubt that al-Qaeda is present in the Palestinian territories and that this presence, especially in Gaza, is facilitated by Hamas,” Abbas told the Arabic paper al-Hayat, *The Times* reported.

Analysts believe that al-Qaeda is trying to establish itself in new areas, particularly Gaza, because it is losing ground in traditional strongholds, such as Iraq.

“Under the Hamas strategic umbrella several salafis and jihadists have proliferated in the Gaza Strip and during the last year have attacked Israeli territory with missiles and rockets, sometimes in coordination with Hamas, sometimes independently,” Ely Karmon, a leading expert at Israel’s Institute for Counter-Terrorism, told The Israel Project.

“In my evaluation these groups will try to revenge Bin Laden’s death by attacking Israel, the best U.S. ally in the region. If these attacks will produce Israeli casualties, they could provoke an Israeli retaliation and a new crisis between Israel and Hamas,” Karmon added.

“This might empower [al-Qaeda] to do more,” Theodore Karasik, the director for research and development at the Institute for Near East & Gulf Military Analysis told Al Jazeera.

Referring to the fear of reprisal for bin Laden’s death,

Karasik said the younger generation of al-Qaeda is “more vicious” and more willing to take chances.

Andrew White, known as the “Vicar of Baghdad” who runs the only Anglican Church in Iraq, dubbed Bin Laden’s death as “very dangerous” because al-Qaeda “will try to show the world that they can and will still commit terror.” He made the comments on his Facebook page.