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Related Categories: Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Afghanistan; Gaza; Iran; Israel

MEET HAMAS' MONEY MAN

The Hamas terror campaign against Israel that took place on October 7th required extensive resources – resources that were amassed and overseen by one man, Zaher Jabarin. A recent *Wall Street Journal* expose profiled the 56-year-old Jabarin, who serves as the terror group's point of contact with its main state sponsor, Iran, as well as handling its investment portfolio and running "a network of private donors and businessmen who invest for the Islamist group." The role has made Jabarin "the CEO of Hamas," Israeli experts say.

Jabarin was sanctioned by the U.S. government back in 2019 for his role in building a real estate empire in Turkey that funneled money to Hamas. However, according to Israeli officials, such censure has had only a "limited impact" on Jabarin's ability to move money and bankroll activities by the terror group. (*Wall Street Journal*, January 4, 2024)

NAVIGATING THE NEW AFGHANISTAN

Ever since the Taliban roared back to power in Afghanistan in 2021 on the heels of a hasty U.S. withdrawal, the international community has grappled with how best to manage the new Islamist regime in Kabul. The global consensus has been to withhold diplomatic recognition from the Taliban, isolating – and hopefully moderating – Afghanistan's new rulers. But that consensus appears to be crumbling. In January, Chinese President Xi Jinping became the first world leader to accept the credentials of the Taliban's envoy to his country. He did so in a formal ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. "China believes that Afghanistan should not be excluded from the international community," a spokesperson for China's Foreign Ministry has explained.

Other countries may soon follow China's example in some fashion – including, potentially, the United States. The Biden administration is reportedly exploring the option of resuming consular access to Afghanistan while stopping short of formally recognizing Taliban rule. The option was raised in the Administration's October 2023 *Integrated Country Study Afghanistan*. Since then, however, the State Department has maintained that there are "no near-term plans to return any diplomatic functions to Kabul." (*Voice of America*, January 30, 2024; *Voice of America*, February 2, 2024)

AL QAEDA ASCENDANT ONCE AGAIN...

Al-Qaeda is experiencing a renaissance in Taliban-led Afghanistan, a new United Nations report has outlined. The January UN Security Council report outlines that the Bin Laden network has begun establishing training facilities and *madrassas* throughout the country, and doing so with the acquiescence of the new ruling regime in Kabul. Moreover, it lays out, the group has established a weapons storage facility in the Panjshir Valley, and has facilitated the transit of its members to and from neighboring Iran. "The group maintains safe houses to facilitate the movement between Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran in the provinces of Herat, Farah, and Helmand, with additional safe house locations in Kabul," it lays out. In turn, according to experts, this activity shows that the group is once again "bolstering its operational capacities and broadening its influence beyond Afghanistan." (*The Foreign Desk*, February 19, 2024)

...AS ISIS SPREADS ITS WINGS

Nor is al-Qaeda the only organization experiencing a revival. The Islamic State is growing anew, a new analysis from the *Voice of America* lays out. The group has claimed 100 attacks across the Global South, and experts have noted a significant increase in both its activities and affiliated attacks since the start of 2024. Of particular concern is the potential for a resurgence of the group in Syria. "The activity of ISIS has increased significantly, especially in our regions and the Syrian desert regions," a representative of the Syrian Democratic Council has noted. "Within less than two months, the organization claimed responsibility for 16 various operations in our regions and more than 30 operations in the Syrian desert region."

Official U.S. assessments of ISIS capabilities differ significantly, however. "Daesh [IS] is not capable beyond small attacks, currently in Iraq and Syria," one senior Pentagon official has contended. It is "not to the level where they're operational, where they can tie their tactical engagements and battles together into an operation. Nor can they hold or seize territory." (*Voice of America*, January 31, 2024)