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NJOHSP

EXECUTIVE INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

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Al-Qa'ida: Adam Gadahn's Death Largely Inconsequential

The death in January of al-Qa'ida media chief Adam Gadahn—the last known American member of the group's senior leadership—will have little impact on al-Qa'ida because Gadahn did not direct operations; he largely failed to motivate Westerners to join the group; and he did not competitively adapt al-Qa'ida's media strategy. To date, al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri has not acknowledged or memorialized Gadahn's death, suggesting Gadahn's contributions to the organization may have diminished in the months and years leading up to his demise.

- As al-Qa'ida's spokesman, Gadahn appeared in 20 videos beginning in October 2004 through his death, only two of which were released after 2012. In March 2014, for example, a video featuring Gadahn, in which he vowed revenge for the death of an al-Qa'ida leader in Syria, was not released under al-Qa'ida's banner nor through the group's official channels.
- As an English-speaker, Gadahn's videos and audio recordings rarely resonated with US and other Western audiences. An OHSP review of approximately 160 terrorism cases in the US from 2000-2015 revealed that only two defendants attributed their desire to join al-Qa'ida to Gadahn. By comparison, deceased al-Qa'ida cleric Anwar al-Aulaqi was cited in 15 of these cases.
- Since last June, Gadahn had not been able to keep pace with the frequency and sophistication of the rival Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's media apparatus. In an interview in March 2013, Gadahn urged followers to use Twitter and Facebook to spread al-Qa'ida's radical messages, but he did not utilize social media to a great extent.

Contact Information

Any agency with information or comments/questions on this or other analytical products, please contact the OHSP Analysis Bureau at analysis@njohsp.gov or 609-584-4000.