



## Web-Street Talk Trends and Analysis

### Topic: Reaction to the broadcasted letter by prominent Islamist *Salman Al-'Awdah* condemning *Bin Ladin*

One of the most politically charged religious subjects discussed this past week on Arabic/Islamic sites was the open letter by the popular Sheikh *Salman Al-'Awdah* condemning *Bin Ladin*, which he read on MBC TV. (See PI-602).

[PI Online](#) filtered and analyzed the responses his criticism generated on six Islamist Websites and on two major networks<sup>1</sup>.

#### Findings:

- While the majority (67.5%) of the 1052 posted comments analyzed by [PI Online](#) were favorable to *Al-'Awdah's* message criticizing *Bin-Ladin*, there were substantial uncertainties and debate over his motives, which many attributed to the pressure exerted on him by the Saudi Government.
- The responses generated immediately after the appearance of the Sheikh on MBC (9/15 and 16) were generally supportive, with many writers attacking *Al-Qaeda* and going as far as disparaging *Al-'Awdah* for not having spoken earlier against *Bin-Ladin*. "Too little, too late" was the reaction by many.
- Later in the week, more skeptical messages surfaced, absolving *Bin-Ladin* and directing the readers' attention to the following usual suspects as reasons for Al-Qaeda's existence: despotic Arab regimes, the Israeli government's treatment of the Palestinians and the United States' occupation of Iraq. In total, 9% of the messages were against *Al-'Awdah* and fully supportive of *Bin Laden* and the other 23.5% exhibited disapproval with the message to a varying degree.
- Of the two major networks, many more writers in *Al-Jazeera* were disapproving of the Sheikh's comments and their writings were more confrontational and emotional than the comments posted on *Al-Arabiya*. The rate of participation was also much higher on the *Al-Arabiya*<sup>2</sup> website.

#### PI Online Conclusion:

***Al-'Awdah* has lifted the veil on a subject which was considered almost taboo among Islamist sheikhs: the open criticism of *Bin-Ladin*. The messages filtered and analyzed appear to be promising in terms of engaging Islamists in a debate resulting in more constructive thinking and repudiation of violence. Interestingly, messages posted on Islamic sites that were critical of *Al-'Awdah*, although reproachful, are more measured in tone (compared to messages posted on the open forum of *Al-Jazeera*), with some conciliatory overtures. This suggests that it may be easier, with the support of prominent respected Sheikhs, to have a positive influence on those with deep religious background than originally thought by many.**

<sup>1</sup> PI Online analyzed data obtained from comments posted on two major networks *AlArabiya* and *Aljazeera* and six sampled Islamic sites where *Al-'Awdah's* open letter to Bin Ladin was posted (Islamonline.net, AlSaha.net, Alsakher.com, Muslm.net, ikhwan.net and alquma.net) - Data was obtained for messages posted between 9/16 and 9/23.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Jazeera: 163 participants vs. 521 for Al-Arabiya



### Original Data Sources:

No.	Main Documents URL	No. of messages
1	<a href="http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2007/09/16/39155.html">http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2007/09/16/39155.html</a>	521
2	<a href="http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/EXERES/8CFEA49A-5A68-4F5B-AD43-4E9ACF45B7B7.htm">http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/EXERES/8CFEA49A-5A68-4F5B-AD43-4E9ACF45B7B7.htm</a>	163
3	<a href="http://www.alsakher.com/vb2/showthread.php?p=1186704">http://www.alsakher.com/vb2/showthread.php?p=1186704</a>	28
4	<a href="http://alquma.net/vb/showthread.php?t=214930">http://alquma.net/vb/showthread.php?t=214930</a>	61
5	<a href="http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=252090">http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=252090</a>	80
6	<a href="http://www.islamonline.net/discussiona/thread.jspa?threadID=17874">http://www.islamonline.net/discussiona/thread.jspa?threadID=17874</a>	58
7	<a href="http://www.ikhwan.net/vb/showthread.php?p=323804#post323804">http://www.ikhwan.net/vb/showthread.php?p=323804#post323804</a>	26
8	<a href="http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?14@126.uO5VhR7VUqj.3@.3baa61b4">http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?14@126.uO5VhR7VUqj.3@.3baa61b4</a>	43
Related Documents URL		
1	<a href="http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?128@84.hM38hA0MUgg.4@.3baa636d">http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?128@84.hM38hA0MUgg.4@.3baa636d</a>	11
2	<a href="http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?128@84.hM38hA0MUgg.2@.3baa65a2">http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?128@84.hM38hA0MUgg.2@.3baa65a2</a>	15
3	<a href="http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?14@188.RMZgh3xfU6a.0@.3baa645a">http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?14@188.RMZgh3xfU6a.0@.3baa645a</a>	29
4	<a href="http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?128@188.RMZgh3xfU6a.0@.3baa625f">http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?128@188.RMZgh3xfU6a.0@.3baa625f</a>	14
5	<a href="http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?128@126.uO5VhR7VUqj.0@.3baa649c">http://alsaha.fares.net/sahat?128@126.uO5VhR7VUqj.0@.3baa649c</a>	3
Total		1052

In support 710      Strongly against 93      Relatively against 249

