



The Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem

A New Player in the Lawless “Wild West” of the Sinai Peninsula?

ICT Database Team

Said Fashafshe, an Israeli-Arab construction worker from Haifa, was killed by militants on 18 June 2012. Fashafshe had been part of the team that was erecting a security fence along Israel's border with the Sinai Peninsula.¹ According to Israeli authorities, preliminary investigation has revealed that three terrorists infiltrated the border between the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula, placed an explosive device on the Philadelphi Strip near Be'er Milka, and waited for Israeli vehicles to arrive. Several minutes later, the device exploded when a vehicle passed, and the gunmen opened fire. They also fired an RPG rocket, which missed its target. As a result of the shooting, one of vehicles rolled down a hill, wounding Fashafshe, who died of his wounds shortly afterwards. Two of the assailants were killed in an ensuing battle with IDF soldiers. The IDF said they believed a third militant had escaped back into Egypt.² IDF forces seized a Kalashnikov assault rifle, grenades, helmets, bullet-proof vests and camouflage clothing.³

Reuters news agency reported on 19 June that it had received footage from several video clips showing a group of masked men who took responsibility for the attack that killed Fashafshe. The masked men touted Islamic slogans and pledged to “liberate the Holy Land” from what they termed “Jewish control”.⁴ The militants claimed to be part of a newly-formed Islamic movement calling itself “The Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem” also known as Majles Shoura Al-Mujahideen.⁵ A second video showed two men, one of whom was about to embark on a mission to attack “the Zionist forces on the border

¹ New York Times, “Militants Attack Israelis Across Egyptian Border, Renewing Concerns on Sinai”, 18 June 2012.

² Haaretz, “Haifa man named as victim of terrorist attack on Egypt border”, 18 June 2012.

³ Jerusalem Post, “Militants Attack Israelis Across Egyptian Border, Renewing Concerns on Sinai”, 18 June 2012.

⁴ Jerusalem Post, “Al-Qaida group claims responsibility for border attack”, 19 June 2012.

⁵ Independent, “Violence continues along Israel-Gaza border leaving two Palestinians dead”, 20 June 2012.



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of Egypt and occupied Palestine". Analysts say this was an apparent reference to the Sinai border attack. The two men identified themselves as Khalid Salah Abd Al-Hadi Jadallah (Abu Salah Al-Masri) from Egypt and Adi Saleh Abdallah Al-Fudhayli Al-Hadhl (Abu Hudhayfa Al-Hudhali) of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The videos could not immediately be verified.⁶ On 27 July 2012, the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem posted a video online in which they again claimed responsibility for the attack of 18 June 2012.⁷ This video also featured Khalid Salah Abd Al-Hadi Jadallah (Abu Salah Al-Masri) and Adi Saleh Abdallah Al-Fudhayli Al-Hadhl (Abu Hudhayfa Al-Hudhali), who said they had carried out the attack. Dressed in military attire, they are shown choosing an Israeli security patrol and a border town as the targets of their attack, which they said was meant to avenge "Muslims' blood"; they dedicated the attack to Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahri.⁸ The video showed the attackers planning their attack using a model of the Sinai Peninsula, receiving training in bomb-making, and learning how to use live ammunition in the desert. Egyptian security officials, who offered little information about the group, said it was unclear where this training had taken place.⁹

Initially, the Israeli government had begun constructing the \$350 million steel border fence that Said Fashafshe and his team were working on when they were attacked to stem the flow of illegal immigration into Israel. However, following this attack, it seems the primary purpose of the fence will be to curb the growing influence of radical Islamist groups operating in the Sinai Peninsula. In a statement following the 18 June attack, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the attack would not slow work on the security fence, which is expected to be completed by the end of 2012.¹⁰

The deteriorating security situation in the Sinai Peninsula has been of serious concern to Israeli and US authorities for quite some time, particularly since the fall of the Mubarak regime in February 2011. The Sinai is fast becoming an area of instability, which is being used as a launching pad for global terrorism. The peninsula is also becoming a source of tension between Egypt and Israel, threatening the 30-year peace agreement between the two

⁷ Reuters, "Sinai Jihadi group says responsible for Israel attack in June", 28 July 2012.

⁸ Haaretz, "Jihadi group in Egypt says responsible for attack killing Israeli on border", 28 July 2012.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ CNN, "Militant Palestinian group behind Israel attack, Egypt official says", 19 June 2012.



countries.¹¹ Israeli authorities suspect that Bedouin located in the Sinai are joining forces with jihadist elements who are assisting in the planning and execution of attacks.¹²

A shadowy group that has used several names – including Ansar Al-Jihad and Al-Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula – announced its formation in 2011, and pledged to "fulfill the oath" of Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda (see Appendix).¹³ The group claimed responsibility for several attacks on the Egypt-Israel natural-gas pipeline that crosses the Sinai Peninsula. In July 2011, dozens of armed men, possibly tribesmen, attacked the police station in El Arish, capital of the Sinai Peninsula. Subsequent to this attack, pamphlets bearing a "Statement from Al-Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula" were circulated; they trumpeted the aims of creating an Islamic emirate in the Sinai, implementing shari'a [Islamic law], destroying the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, halting discrimination against the Sinai's Bedouin tribes, and demanding Egyptian military intervention on behalf of the Hamas regime in Gaza. This latter demand was repeated in a subsequently-posted video.¹⁴ Another jihadist group calling itself Ansar Bet Al-Maqdes [Supporters of Jerusalem] has *also* posted a video online in which it takes responsibility for multiple explosions of Egypt's gas pipeline to Israel, which has been attacked over a dozen times since 2011.¹⁵

In April 2012, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the Sinai Peninsula was becoming a lawless "wild West".¹⁶ The Bedouin who inhabit the peninsula are becoming semi-autonomous players in the regional arena, and are for the first time assuming an independent role in determining control over the peninsula and its relations with adjacent areas. The Bedouin are now in a position to affect Israeli-Egyptian relations, initiating crises that neither government wants while also influencing the struggle between Israel and Hamas.¹⁷ The Israeli government is concerned that terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip are also using the Sinai as a fertile breeding ground for their extremist ideology, radicalizing the native Bedouin tribesmen who were long considered second-class citizens under the Mubarak regime.¹⁸

¹¹ Jerusalem Post, "Sinai could be next terror hotspot, says study", 16 August 2012.

¹² The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "Sinai: A New Front", January 2012.

¹³ Jamestown, "Has Al-Qaeda Opened A New Chapter In The Sinai Peninsula?", 17 August 2011.

¹⁴ The Atlantic, "Is al-Qaeda Growing in Egypt?", 13 February 2012.

¹⁵ Reuters, "Sinai Jihadi group says responsible for Israel attack in June", 28 July 2012.

¹⁶ Jerusalem Post, "PM says Sinai is new "Wild West"", 24 April 2012.

¹⁷ The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "Sinai: A New Front", January 2012.

¹⁸ CSMonitor, "[Egypt airstrikes in Sinai kill 20 'terrorists' in reprisal for attacks on military posts](#)", 8 August 2012.



In recent months, there have been numerous incidents between the Egyptian Army and armed members of jihadist groups, many of whom belong to cells identified with Al-Qaeda throughout the Middle East. To illustrate: the militants aligned with the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem who were responsible for the attack that killed Said Fashafshe were not (local) Palestinians, but rather a Saudi Arabian and an Egyptian. This interesting development may signal a deliberate effort to establish the Sinai as a new base of jihad, providing an opportunity for all Muslims – and not only Palestinians from the Gaza Strip – to fight Israel. Authorities suspect that jihadists from Yemen, Iraq, Syria and other Arab and Muslim countries are training the militants now operating in the Sinai, and are helping them perpetrate attacks.¹⁹

The situation in the Sinai Peninsula worsened on 6 August 2012, when 16 Egyptian police officers were killed and seven others wounded as they were breaking the daily fast of the holy month of Ramadan with a sunset meal. The attackers commandeered an armored vehicle, which they later used to storm across the border into Israel, where they were hit by an Israeli airstrike that killed at least six of them.²⁰ The attack sent a clear message to both Israel and Egypt that the attackers were major players in the region capable of high-level, sophisticated attacks like those carried out by Al-Qaeda elsewhere.²¹ Following the attack, Mohammed Mursi, Egypt's president, sacked his intelligence chief for failing to act on an Israeli warning, delivered just days before the attack, that such an attack was imminent; he also ordered the first air strike in the Sinai Peninsula in almost 40 years,²² which killed 20 suspected militants. Nine Islamic militants in the northern Sinai were also arrested on suspicion of having been responsible for carrying out the attack.²³ The challenge now facing Israeli and Egyptian security forces is that this type of attack may continue because of the security situation in the Sinai – that is, the almost complete lack of real obstacles to terrorism.²⁴ Although no group has claimed responsibility for the attack, it is worth noting that the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem released a statement saying it was *not* responsible.²⁵ It is too early to determine if stability will return to the Sinai, or how

¹⁹ The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "Is al Qaeda Establishing a Foothold in Sinai?", 20 June 2012.

²⁰ Haaretz, "Sinai attack proves Islamist terrorists are targeting Egyptians as well as Israelis", 6 August 2012.

²¹ AP, "Egypt Sinai Attack: Gunmen Attack Police Station In Lawless Region", 6 August 2012.

²² Telegraph, "Egypt president Mohammed Morsi sacks intelligence chief", 8 August 2012.

²³ AP, "Egypt arrests 9 militants linked to Sinai attacks", 10 August 2012.

²⁴ Haaretz, "Sinai attack proves Islamist terrorists are targeting Egyptians as well as Israelis", 6 August 2012.

²⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah Media Center, "Statement of denying any relation of killing the Egyptian soldiers by Majlis Shura Al-Mujahidin in the environs of Bayt Al-Maqdis", 9 August 2012.



the Egyptian government will gain control of the peninsula. However, the operation of shadowy Al-Qaeda affiliates there is making the area increasingly dangerous.

Profile: The Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem [Majlis Shura Al-Mujahideen]



Little is known about the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem. The authorities first became aware of the group when after it posted a video to the Reuters news agency on 19 June 2012, in which it claimed responsibility for an attack on Israeli targets on the Sinai border the previous day. Subsequent videos showed the two men who had purportedly carried out the attack, and again took responsibility for perpetrating it (see pp. 1-2 above).

Ideology

It is unclear whether the group is directly linked to Al-Qaeda “central” or merely shares its ideology. What is clear is that the group seems to have been inspired by Al-Qaeda. For example, it attributed the cross-border attack in June 2012 to retaliation for the death of former Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. In its statement online, the group’s militants called the attack "a gift to our brothers in Qaedat Al-Jihad and Sheikh Zawahiri". Also, an Al-Qaeda flag appears in the upper left hand corner of most of the frames in the video glorifying the 18 June attack.²⁶ To date, no official recognition has been given this or any of the other jihadist groups operating in the area by Al-Qaeda’s media outlet. However, prominent Al-Qaeda leaders have focussed on the Sinai Peninsula as a platform from which to wage jihad. In mid-February 2011, Sheikh Atiyah Allah Abu Abd Al-Rahman, a prominent Al-Qaeda leader and ideologue, called on the mujahideen to establish

²⁶ Long War Journal, “Mujahideen Shura Council calls attack in Israel 'a gift' to Zawahiri and 'our brothers' in al Qaeda - The Long War Journal”, 30 July 2012.



appropriate infrastructure in Rafah, the Sinai Peninsula, and Egypt as a basis for future jihadist activity.²⁷ In one of his audio commentaries on the Egyptian revolution, Al-Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri encouraged further attacks on Israeli targets, and publicly congratulated those who had attacked the gas pipeline.²⁸

Organizational Structure and Leadership



While it is unclear how many members the group has, the statements it has released online indicate that it is composed of Saudi and Egyptian fighters. This is illustrated by the identities of the 18 June attackers (see p. 2 above).

So far, it appears that the group's primary *modus operandi* is cross-border raids.

Related Articles:

1. Reuters, "Sinai Jihadi group says responsible for Israel attack in June", 29 June 2012.
2. Jamestown Foundation, "Thirtieth Anniversary of Sinai's Liberation Marked by Libyan Arms, Bedouin Militancy and a Growing Rift with Israel", 18 May 2012.
3. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "Sinai: A New Front", January 2012.
4. The International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, "Israel through the Prism of a Re-evaluation of the 'Seven Stage Plan'", August 2012.

²⁷ ICT, "Israel through the Prism of a Re-evaluation of the "Seven Stage Plan"", August 2012.

²⁸ Jamestown, "Has Al-Qaeda Opened A New Chapter In The Sinai Peninsula?", 17 August 2011.



Appendix

Below is a translation from the Arabic of two announcements by the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem. The first formally announces the group's establishment, and the second is its official claim of responsibility for the 18 June 2012 attack on the Sinai-Israel border.

Announcement 1

Notice to the Believers in the Oneness of God [Tawheed] Regarding the Establishment of "The Shura Council of the Mujahideen in the Environs of Jerusalem" [Lajnat Al-Shura fi Aknaf Beit Al-Mukadess]

All Praise Be to Allah, All Thanks Be to Allah, We Beg Allah's Help and Mercy. May Allah preserve our souls and guard our deeds against evil. He who walks in the footsteps of Allah is guided on the straight path, and he who strays from the straight path will find none to guide him. To wit:

The light of the true and noble caliphate has again begun to shine. The giddy braying of Allah's steeds, galloping from afar, grows ever louder over the Horns of Hittin.²⁹ The Muslim Nation [ummah] has begun to stir from its deep and lengthy slumber, to bring an end to decades of oppression, deprivation and fear. The oppression visited upon the Muslims most cruelly, which has been reflected in abdication of the laws of Allah on earth, has begun to dissipate. The tyrannical governments have fallen, and millions have taken to the streets demanding to implement the law of Allah the Merciful [shari'a], even as they herald the imminent coming of the Time of Allah.

The Shura Council of the Mujahideen in Jerusalem and Environs has had a hand in what has transpired. The pharaoh of Egypt has been destroyed, and the Nusairi [Alawite] despot of Syria [Al-Sham] is soon to fall, toppled by the blessed winds of Islam. The dictators of Lebanon and Jordan squirm uneasily, and the spirit of torment, emanating from the summit and the base of Mt. Sinai, is visited upon the Jews.

Since there are things behind these enormous events, Muslims throughout the land, and especially in the vicinity of Jerusalem, must prepare for the next stage. This will require that our Nation thoroughly order its ranks and make ready by carrying a unified message

²⁹ Hittin: the site on which Salah Al-Din defeated the Crusader armies.



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under the banner of monotheism, and by exploiting its capabilities to benefit a program that will be implemented under that one banner and with one goal, even though the means, priorities, and starting points vary. We must prepare for this stage so that we may exploit this opportunity to thwart the enemies of the Muslim Nation who wait in ambush, and thwart their traitorous and deceitful partners in crime. From this day henceforward, nationalism, secularism and democracy have no place. This is a war in which the Muslims must reinstate the rule of Allah on earth, and restore the honor and sovereignty of the Muslim Nation over mankind, until the word of Allah is heard and the words of the infidels silenced. All faith will be in Allah.

We hereby declare that, putting our faith in Allah alone, we have established the Shura Council of the Mujahideen in the Environs of Jerusalem, knowing that we are at a turning point, at which our dear Nation is being tried and tested because of its faith – a faith instilled in us from the moment we set foot on the path of God’s Unity [tawheed] – because we believers in the Oneness of God focus our efforts, because we hoist the banner of Islam, because of the bloodshed of those who have followed the path of the righteous, because of the grounds for victory, because of our determination to vanquish the enemy. In this we are laying the cornerstone of blessed jihad, that we may become a brick in the sublime global edifice of the restored true and noble caliphate where Islamic law [shari’a] will be implemented, thereby aiding the Lord of All Worlds. We incline toward the believers and pardon the errors of the righteous. We set forth with a healthy Islamic-legal understanding honed and burnished by suffering. We will consider priorities, we will eradicate corruption, we will balance interests according to Islamic law, and we will defend our Muslim Nation as Allah enables us to. We extend our hand to every Muslim who wishes to aid Islam and fight its enemies. We ask Allah to guide us on the straight path. We do not purport to be blameless of error and sin, and we do not have a monopoly on the banner of monotheism. The door is open to all honest men who wish to join our ranks. Those who hasten to do so, are the devoted of Allah.

To the Muslims, to all those who believe in the Oneness of God, to the mujahideen, and to the scholars [ulama’a] and clerics: We are your sons and brothers on the lands around Jerusalem; our banner, with Allah’s help, is the banner of Islamic law; our faith is the faith of the Sunnis; and our path is the path of the righteous forefathers of Islam, may Allah be pleased with them. We will battle those who most hate the believes, and we will



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defend the sanctity and honor of those who believe in the Oneness of God. Do not keep us from victory; we will stave off the traitors and manage the home front. We will not perform deeds in your name: Do not you perform deeds in our name, by Allah's grace.

Lastly, we say to the enemies of Allah and to the Jews: Know, Infidel, that what is fated to happen will happen not as in the past; the cup from which you have forced Jerusalem's Muslims to drink – with the help of Allah the Great Avenger, we will force you to drink a slaking poison from it. The swords of the adherents of the Oneness of God – those who smashed the heads of your ancestors, the Bani Nadhir³⁰ – those swords have been withdrawn from their scabbards, and will be stained with your blood when we have obliterated all you have conquered. The time of negotiations, cease-fires, and interim solutions – which have only mounted your cruel deeds – is over and gone. O Infidel, it is best that you know what it is that will blacken your hideous countenance. With Allah's help, the second battle of Hittin draws nigh.

³⁰ The reference is to the Jewish Nadhir Tribe which dwelled in the Arabian Peninsula and was massacred by the Muslims at the behest of the Prophet Muhammad.



Announcement 2

The Shura Council of the Mujahideen Takes Responsibility for the Terrorist Attack: Bringing Aid to Al-Aqsa and the Prisoners

The Shura Council of the Mujahideen perpetrated a blessed terrorist attack, known as "bringing aid to Al-Aqsa and the prisoners". After stealing over the border and encircling the Zionist forces concentrated on the border between Occupied Palestine and the Land of Egypt – that is, in the southern Negev Desert – [the attackers] targeted a Jewish convoy of two army jeeps with an improvised explosive device, anti-tank missiles and semi-automatic weapons. Allah enabled the mujahideen to strike at the enemies of Allah. We know this from the garbled statements of the enemy commanders, Praise Be to Allah.

We authorized this infiltration, for which the righteous and the mujahideen, the believers in the Oneness of God [tawheed], were responsible. [They were heeding] the screams emanating from the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the moans of the prisoners bending under the oppression of the craven Jewish enemy. On Allah's Life, we have not forgotten [the attempts to make these lands Jewish] or the Jewish criminals' repeated attacks against the spot where Allah's Messenger ascended to Heaven. It is inconceivable that we would ignore the suffering of Muslims incarcerated in the prisons of the Jews. It is our right to assist them in any way possible. The sermons, celebrations, and declarations about our Al-Aqsa and our prisoners – who refrain from satisfying their hunger [that is, who are on hunger strike – trans.] – have become intolerable. Nothing beats iron but iron; without bloodshed, this ignominy will not be erased.

The knights of the incursion, two mujahideen, are heroes and martyrs [shahids]:

1. Khaled Saleh Abd Al-Hadi Abu Saleh Al-Masri [from Moursi Matruh, Egypt]
2. Oudai Saleh Abdullah Al-Fachili Al-Hathali Abu Hathifa Al-Hathali [from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia]

We of the Shura Council of the Mujahideen in the Environs of Jerusalem part from these our two martyred mujahideen...



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(Hereafter, the Shura Council blesses Sheikh Osama bin Laden, the Syrian people who are fighting the regime of Bashar Al-Assad, the mujahideen in all arenas of jihad, and the Salafi-jihadists in the Gaza Strip.)