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International Institute
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ICT Jihadi Monitoring Group

THE WAR IN GAZA AS REFLECTED IN THE GLOBAL JIHADIST DISCOURSE

It seems that Operation “Protective Edge”, which began on July 8, 2014 in order to stop Hamas’s rocket fire from the Gaza Strip towards Israeli settlements, was expected to bring about a significant shift in the global jihadist discourse in terms of increased militant rhetoric against Israel. This expectation was based on the effect that of Operation "Cast Lead" had in 2009 on the jihadist discourse, the condemnation of Israel by Sheikh Osama bin Laden and Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri, leaders of Al-Qaeda, and the call for the liberation of Palestine.¹ However, throughout Operation “Protective Edge”, not a single statement was made by the Al-Qaeda leadership, including Ayman al-Zawahiri, or by Sheikh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, leader of the ISIS, Al-Qaeda’s adversary, regarding the war in Gaza. The meager extent of the jihadist discourse and the weak reactions of jihadists on the subject, as well as the limited statements expressing solidarity with the residents of Gaza, demonstrated that the war in Gaza is being pushed to the sidelines of the jihadist discourse. The unusual effort to advance the issue of the Palestinian problem to the top of the agenda became evident only in mid-August 2014 with the publication of a new English jihadist magazine titled, “*Palestine, betrayal of the guilty conscience*”, by AQAP, which sought to emphasize that while the Palestinian problem has not been abandoned, it has been deferred to a later stage.

Ansar al-Shari’a in Tunisia, an organization affiliated with global jihad in Tunisia, published an announcement on its media site, “Al-Bayariq” in which it expressed solidarity and empathy for the pain suffered by Muslims in Gaza.² In another statement that was published in honor of Eid al-Fitr, it tied together the problem of Muslims in Gaza with those of other Muslims in areas of conflict around the world, such as Burma and Waziristan.³

Abu al-Harith al-Maqdisi, a member of a Salafi-jihadist organization in Syria named the Ansar al-Shari’a Army, settled for the publication of a video clip in support of the residents of Gaza.⁴ Several

¹ Operation “Cast Lead” was a comprehensive military operation carried out by the IDF in the Gaza Strip between December 27, 2008 – January 18, 2009 as a result of incessant rocket fire from the Strip that was directed at civilians and settlements in southern Israel. As a result of the operation, Sheikh Osama bin Laden and Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leaders of Al-Qaeda, made several proclamations against Israel and called for the liberation of Palestine. For further information regarding the jihadist discourse that developed as a result of this operation, see:

ICT’s JWMG, "Israel through the Prism of a Re-evaluation of the Seven Stage Plan" <http://bit.ly/1shuaLL>

² <http://bit.ly/1ouyfbV>

³ <http://justpaste.it/geo5>

⁴ <https://twitter.com/alfwaris1>

Islamic State militants made do with holding signs that expressed support for the people of Gaza.⁵ In the magazine, *Dabiq*, which was published in English by the ISIS at the end of July 2014, the editor devoted one paragraph to the war in Gaza and emphasized that the organization focused on actions, not words: *“Its actions speak louder than its words and it is only a matter of time and patience before it reaches Palestine to fight the barbaric Jews and kill those of them hiding behind the gharqad trees - the trees of the Jews.”* In addition, the organization emphasized that it would fight against anyone who stands in the way of Palestine.⁶



Daash militants in Syria waving banners in support of the residents of Gaza

The only unusual response was given by **Sheikh Ali Mahmoud Raji**, the official spokesperson for Al-Shabab Al-Mujahideen, Al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Somalia. The organization’s news agency, Al-Shahada, published part of a Friday sermon that Raji gave about the Gaza war on July 25. According to him, Israel, the United States and other infidel countries worked together to kill Muslims in Gaza, including children, women and the elderly. He added that the Arab countries neighboring Gaza did not lift a finger to help their brothers in Gaza and even helped the Jews by closing their borders to the Gazan people. According to him, the United Nations also carried responsibility since it chose to stand aside and settle for condemnation. In light of this, he called on Muslims to carry out acts of revenge against Jews around the world. *“Jews are scattered around the world and their money is everywhere. Therefore, Muslims must attack Jews and their property everywhere, and help their*

⁵ https://twitter.com/al_khansaa2/status/488786476294213632/photo/1

⁶ *Dabiq*, July 2014, p.4.

Muslim brothers in Gaza.” Finally, he claimed that the Jews were the ones behind the enemy invasion into Somalia. Therefore, he insisted that one must bravely face the enemy in order to prevent a similar fate to the one that befell Muslims in Gaza.⁷ It should be noted that his remarks were not emphasized in jihadist forums or covered by social media.

In contrast to the weak reactions of Islamic jihad activists, the active participation of all Palestinian Salafi-jihadist organizations in the war was noteworthy (see appendix), both in the field and through the extensive use of social networks for PR purposes,⁸ although only on a minor scale and to a lesser extent than Hamas and Islamic Jihad. For example, Palestinian Salafi-jihadist organizations claimed responsibility for a series of missiles that were launched at Israeli settlements, and they published PR videos and interviews with Palestinian jihad commanders about the war. **Ansar Bayt al-Maqdas**, for instance, claimed responsibility for the launch of several missiles towards Eilat. A senior official in the organization even asked to send a “message to the Jewish enemies of Allah. Do not think that our battle with your traitorous collaborators in Egypt distracts our attention from you. It is part of our preparations for the mujahideen’s great upcoming battle against you. Wait for the armies of the mujahideen that will arrive from Egypt, Iraq and the Levant”. It should be noted that the **Yahya Ayash Brigades**, a Palestinian Salafi-jihadist organization, which launched missiles at Israel from Lebanon, acted on behalf of the **Abdullah Azzam Brigade**, a Salafi-jihadist organization operating in Lebanon.



In the photo, a senior member of Ansar Bayt al-Maqdas threatens to attack Jews.

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1510029469228649>

⁸ See, for example, the Twitter page that included all of the statements and videos made by Palestinian Salafi-jihadist factions during the war in Gaza: 2014_عدوان_في_السلفي_في_الحصاد_السلفي_في_عدوان_2014 :

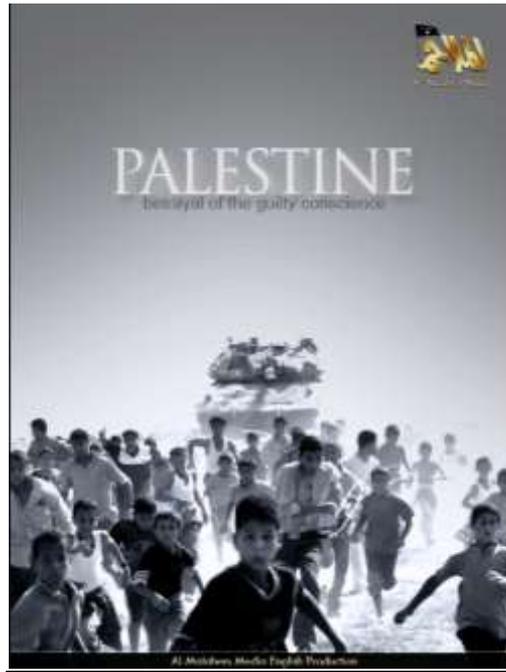
On August 16, 2014 it seemed that the trend was beginning to change and that the Palestinian problem was advancing into the jihadist consciousness with the publication of a new English jihadist magazine titled, *Palestine, betrayal of the guilty conscience* (24 pp.), by the Al-Malahem jihadist media institution, which serves as a platform for AQAP publications. However, while the introduction by the editor of the magazine indicated that the importance of the “liberation of Palestine” from Israel has not faded in the eyes of the mujahideen, it also made it clear that global jihad fighters have no intention of helping the Palestinians in their war against Israel at this stage due to the support that Israel receives from the United States and from neighboring Arab countries. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the mujahideen to first dedicate themselves to fighting against Arab regimes and American targets. The war against Israel must be deferred to a later stage when the conditions are ripe, the Arab regimes are weakened and America’s grip on the region is substantially reduced. Therefore, the editor is comforted by the fact that the current magazine is intended to serve as a guide to provide the Palestinians with tools on methods of self-armament and bomb production.



The editor's introduction to the new magazine

In effect, the new magazine is similar in appearance to the magazine, *Inspire*, which is also published by AQAP and aimed at Muslim communities in Western countries in order to promote individual jihad. The new magazine includes a collection of articles and speeches by senior jihadists, both living and dead, most of which were published in previous editions of *Inspire* and in other publications regarding the importance of the Palestinian problem. It also includes detailed and illustrated explanations that were published in previous editions of *Inspire* on how to build bombs and car bombs, among other things, in order to promote individual jihad against Israeli and American targets.⁹

⁹ <https://twitter.com/AladeebShaker/status/502108563389444096>



The magazine banner

Egypt as an Enemy of Muslims

During the war, jihad activists also addressed Egypt's role in the Gaza war. They expressed anger with Egypt's conduct, calling it an enemy dangerous to Muslims, and called for more terrorist attacks to be carried out against Egyptian targets. **Ansar Bayt al-Maqdas**, for example, accused the Egyptian army of collaborating with Israel on the war in Gaza, the closure of the Rafah border crossing, and the prevention of injured Palestinians from getting medical treatment. In light of this, the organization threatened to attack Egyptian security forces. This threat was published on July 23 after the Israeli Air Force killed three members of the organization in the Sinai Peninsula as they launched rockets towards southern Israel. The organization made good on its threat and claimed responsibility for the killing of several Egyptian military officers, claiming that they had been responsible for protecting the borders with Israel and the blockade on Gaza.¹⁰ The **Salafi Army of the Nation in Jerusalem**, a Palestinian Salafi-jihadist organization, expressed anger with Egypt's support of Israel's military operation and emphasized that it constituted a flagrant violation of Islamic principles. The organization called on clerics in Egypt and on the Egyptian people to unite

¹⁰ https://twitter.com/Ansar_B_Almqds/status/493863222647463936

and work to replace the President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, by means of jihad. In addition, the organization called for an increase in terrorist attacks against Egyptian security forces and criticized Abu Mazen, the head of the Palestinian Authority, calling him a traitor and infidel because of his increased ties with Israel. According to the organization, its goal is to establish an Islamic caliphate on the ruins of the Jewish State to serve as a basis for the occupation of Rome.¹¹ Sheikh Abu Qatada al-Filistini, who is imprisoned in a Jordanian jail, also criticized al-Sisi and called him an evil worse than Bashar al-Assad.¹²



A video clip of the Salafi Army of the Nation in Jerusalem criticizing Israel and al-Sisi's regime in Egypt

Sheikh Ibrahim al-Rubaysh, a senior ideologue in AQAP, took advantage of the fighting in Gaza to criticize the Egyptian and Saudi regimes. In a video clip that was published on August 12, 2014 by the Al-Malahem jihadist media institution, al-Rubaysh claimed that the rulers of Saudi Arabia hired al-Sisi to tighten the blockade on Gaza and to close the border with Gaza during the operation against Hamas. In his opinion, Israel is like a chair leaning against the legs of “traitorous” Arab rulers. A hit to one of the chair’s legs, he noted, would cause the chair to collapse just as a hit on one of the Arab regimes that collaborate with Israel would result in serious damage to Israel’s security.¹³

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8oyTeXJFNY>

¹² <http://assawsana.com/portal/pages.php?newsid=182389>

¹³ <http://al3aren.com/vb/showthread.php?t=3594>



A clip from the speech by Sheikh Ibrahim al-Rubaysh

Summary

In summary, it is apparent that the war in Gaza did not take up a large part of the jihadist global discourse and was pushed to the sidelines, in stark contrast to the Palestinian Salafi-jihadist factions in the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula that demanded war. It is possible that the jihadist discourse concerning the war in Gaza was pushed to the sidelines as it focused on other issues, including: the Islamic State's declaration of the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Iraq-Syria at the end of June 2014 as well as its intensive operations in Iraq that threaten to cause the collapse of the central government; the growing rift between Al-Qaeda and the ISIS in Syria; the deterioration of the security situation in Libya; and al-Zawahiri's decline in status as a result of the rift. In addition, it is evident from the attitude of AQAP towards the fighting between Hamas and Israel (as seen in al-Rubaysh's speech and in the new magazine published on the subject) that the top priority for global jihad fighters is the battle against Arab regimes and against American interests in the region. While the battle against Israel also occupies a central place, is not applicable now and is being postponed to a later stage when the regimes of Israel's neighboring Arab countries have weakened and U.S. influence in the region has declined.

Appendix

The list of prominent Salafi-jihadist organizations that claimed responsibility for the launch of missiles and rockets towards Israel during Operation “Protective Edge”:



**The Shura Council of the
Mujahideen (Palestinian)**



**Ansar Bayt a-Maqdas
(Palestinian)**



**The Salafi Army of the
Nation in Jerusalem
(Palestinian)**



**Al-Nasser Salah al-Deen Brigades –
Liwa al-Tawhid (Palestinian)**



**Yahya Ayyash Brigades
(Palestinian)**

ABOUT THE ICT

Founded in 1996, the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) is one of the leading academic institutes for counter-terrorism in the world, facilitating international cooperation in the global struggle against terrorism. ICT is an independent think tank providing expertise in terrorism, counter-terrorism, homeland security, threat vulnerability and risk assessment, intelligence analysis and national security and defense policy. ICT is a non-profit organization located at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya, Israel which relies exclusively on private donations and revenue from events, projects and programs.

ABOUT THE JIHADI MONITORING GROUP

The Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group (JWMG) is a specialized research and analysis team at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT). Composed of researchers fluent in Arabic, the JWMG monitors websites that support and serve the Global Jihad organizations. The unique characteristic of JWMG publications is the team's integration of diverse materials from a wide variety of Arabic sources. JWMG connects each source to larger trends, providing a complete understanding of events on both a local and a global scale.

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