

Highlight

Challenges and Coping Mechanisms

An assessment of the situation as of January 2016¹

Working Premises

1. The “Far Enemy” (the West) and Israel constitute a central target for global jihad organizations, including the Islamic State.
2. “The (relative) strategic distress” of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq will influence its actions in the international arena.
3. The Islamic State adopted the modus operandi of global jihad against the “Far Enemy” by using local recruits (from the West) to carry out terrorist attacks in their own countries and by providing logistical planning and assistance.
4. The Islamic State is focusing efforts on carrying out terrorist attacks against countries participating in the coalition who are fighting the organization in Iraq and Syria. The organization encourages recruitment, makes open threats against the countries operating against it, and claims responsibility for the attacks that are carried out.
5. Recruitment to the Islamic State, the organization’s process of radicalization, and its transmission of messages, information and instructions, are mostly carried out via the Internet through the various channels used by the organization, including jihadist Web forums, social networks, media institutions, the darknet, and more.
6. In recent months, and against the backdrop of a wave of stabbing attacks, there has been an increase in the terrorist discourse encouraging terrorism and the Islamic State’s interest in Israel. In the framework of the media campaign against Israel, a wide range of

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videos were published that referred to holy places in Israeli territory, while calling for continued attacks by “lone wolves”. In addition, in October 2015 a video was published by a member of the Islamic State threatening Israel, in Hebrew.² This issue reached its peak with the declaration by Abu Bakr al-Bagdadi in December 2015 in which he threatened “**to turn Palestine into a graveyard for its Jewish residents**”.³

7. The Islamic State is not the only/first global jihad organization to operate against Israel. Israel was already defined as a target back in 2005 in the framework of Al-Qaeda’s “Seven Stages Plan”.⁴ The strategic plan was translated into operational actions in the field, with an emphasis on the establishment of terrorist networks/“sleeper cells”. However, this plan never reached full operational capabilities due to the outbreak of the “Arab Spring”.
8. The implementation of terrorist attacks in the West and against Israel is not dependent on a fundamental organizational decision; a decision that, according to our assessment, has already been made. Rather, the implementation is dependent on other influencing factors, including: operational capability, the attack arena, hindering factors, thwarting factors, etc.
9. The radicalization process and the recruitment of foreign fighters to the Islamic State are a significant component of the organization’s ability to carry out terrorist attacks, and a substantial effort should be made to stop/reduce this process.
10. National and international cooperation are necessary in order to combat the Islamic State.
11. Counter actions must be synchronized and managed at the state level, and must include the following elements: government, civil society, Muslim society, security agencies, former jihadists, etc.

² Gilad Shiloh. “The Media Blitz of the Islamic State against its Enemies and its Characteristics”. (*in Hebrew*) *Beehive: The Discourse on Social Networks in the Middle East*. Vol 4, Issue 1. Retrieved from:

http://dayan.org/he/sites/default/files/Beehive_2016_Jan_HEB.pdf

³ December 26, 2015. <http://www.cssn.tk/2015/12/5t.html>

⁴ “Al-Qaeda’s Operational Strategies - The Attempt to Revive the Debate Surrounding the Seven Stages Plan”, International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) - JW MG Insights, July 12, 2009. Retrieved from:

http://www.ict.org.il/Portals/0/Internet%20Monitoring%20Group/JW MG_AI-Qaeda_Operational_Strategies.pdf

The Islamic State's Threats to Israel

Threats from the Northeast Arena - Syria, Iraq, Jordan

In recent months there has been continuous erosion to the Islamic State's arena of control in Syria and Iraq in light of successful moves by the coalition as well as local ground forces.

The erosion of the organization's strategic stability has led the Islamic State to channel most of its efforts to defensive actions and to the expansion of secondary infrastructure and main centers beyond the Syrian-Iraqi arena, such as infrastructure in Libya and Sinai.

Recently, the Islamic State has succeeded in establishing control in Daraa, which is located in the Syria-Jordan-Israel border triangle, thereby creating a threat to both Israel and Jordan.

Short-term threat - In light of its strategic situation, it is reasonable to assume that, in the short-term, the Islamic State will not open a new battlefield against Israel from Syrian territory. Rather, it will suffice with carrying out targeted terrorist attacks from Jordan on Israel, or by recruiting Israeli Arabs or Palestinians.

Mid/long-term threat - Cannot be assessed at this stage.

Threats from the Southern Arena - Sinai and Gaza

In recent years, the Sinai Peninsula has become a global jihad front via its southern border with Israel. Sinai's decades-long lack of true governance has pushed the Bedouin tribes to turn to illegal activities, including engaging in crime and aiding terrorist organizations. Some of the Bedouin have even adopted the jihadist ideology and joined terrorist organizations operating in Sinai, especially Hamas and global jihad.⁵

The primary organization affiliated with the Islamic State in the Sinai is "Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis". This organization was previously affiliated with Al-Qaeda, but in 2014 it swore

⁵ *A History of Terrorism in Egypt's Sinai*. Middle East Institute. Retrieved from: <http://www.mei.edu/sinai-terrorism>; Emily Dyer and Oren Kessler. *Terror in the Sinai*. The Henry Jackson Society. 2014. Retrieved from: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/HJS-Terror-in-the-Sinai-Report-Colour-Web.pdf>

allegiance to the Islamic State and changed its name to the “Sinai Province of the Islamic State”.⁶

In Gaza, several Salafi-jihadist networks have formed and sworn allegiance to the Islamic State. These networks challenge Hamas’s control and promote the Islamic State’s ideology in the Gaza Strip. Terrorist organizations in Gaza affiliated with the Salafi-jihadist movement have previously led to clashes with Hamas, which has controlled Gaza since 2007, especially when they called for a challenge to the Hamas hegemony in the Strip. Hamas, for its part, is fighting supporters of the Islamic State in Gaza and is trying to suppress any action that undercuts its hegemony over Gaza.

Nevertheless, due to various considerations and interests, Hamas often allows operatives from Gaza to assist members of the “Sinai Province of the Islamic State” in the organizations’ joint struggle against the Egyptian regime. These operations include the continued smuggling of weaponry, especially rockets, from Libya and Iran through the tunnels in Rafah; the treatment of those wounded fighting against the Egyptian army at Gaza hospitals; and sometimes even the transfer of intelligence gathered by drones about Egyptian army targets. The duality of Hamas’s tough stance against Islamic State supporters in Gaza and its cooperation with Islamic State fighters in Sinai is in line with the movement’s traditional pragmatic policies that are driven by the central strategy of maintaining control in the Gaza Strip while continuing to carry out “resistance” operations. Cooperation with the Islamic State in Sinai is intended to maintain open weapons-smuggling channels to the Strip for the purpose of acquiring more rockets to fire at Israel.

An assessment of the threat level to Israel from the Sinai arena - At this stage, the organization is not focusing efforts on terrorist attacks against Israel from the Sinai arena. Nevertheless, its deployment in Sinai along the border with Israel and its cooperation with Hamas in Gaza will enable it to carry out terrorist attacks against Israel within a short period of time once the decision is made to do so. These attacks could include: rocket fire, shooting ambushes, hostage-takings or suicide attacks against towns inside Israel or along the border (Eilat, Route 12, and towns near the border or border crossings).

⁶ Borzou Daragahi. *Sinai jihadi group emerges at forefront of Egypt violence*. Financial Times. January 31, 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/b5ad40d0-8a7b-11e3-9c29-00144feab7de.html#axzz3RfJCfft2>

An assessment of the threat level to Israel from the Gaza Strip arena - Entities affiliated with the Islamic State in Gaza are focusing on carrying out terrorist attacks against Israel and on recruiting militants from the territories. There are two factors which restrain these entities: operational capabilities and interference from Hamas.

In general, the Islamic State has the operational infrastructure and capability to carry out terrorist attacks against Israel from both the Sinai and Gaza arenas. It should be noted that the execution of such attacks is dependent on an organizational decision, and on overcoming the obstacles posed by Egyptian security forces in Sinai and by Hamas in Gaza. It is reasonable to assume that, due to the operational distress facing the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, the organization is liable to open a new front against Israel from the Sinai and Gaza arenas.

The Domestic Threat facing Israel

2015 saw an increased of Israeli Arabs influenced by the Islamic State and their recruitment to its ranks. Dozens of Israeli Arabs and Palestinians recruited by Islamic State crossed the border into Syria, some of whom were arrested after they returned to Israel, while others were arrested during earlier stages of their recruitment. According to 2014 estimates, approximately 40 Israeli Arabs left to fight in Syria, four of whom were killed in battle while several others returned to Israel where they were caught and charged.⁷ Open data from security agencies shows that during 2015 at least two Israeli Arab cells that were thwarted had planned to carry out an Islamic State-inspired attack in Israel.

The recruitment of Israeli Arabs to the Islamic State is no different in its characteristics than the recruitment of foreign fighters from Muslim communities in the West to the organization. It is a product of the radicalization process being carried out through the Islamic State's recruitment channels on the Internet. It is designed to recruit foreign fighters to leave for arenas of jihad and to recruit fighters to carry out terrorist attacks in their own countries. From an organizational viewpoint, this is a strategic means of carrying out

⁷ *The Departure of Israeli Arabs to the Fighting Arena in Syria. (in Hebrew)* Shabak Web site. November 6, 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.shabak.gov.il/publications/study/pages/skira061114.aspx>

terrorist attacks with proven success (such as the attacks in France). In this context, it should be emphasized that the Dizengoff terrorist, Nashat Milhem, an Arab-Israeli from Arara who carried out the attack at the “Simta” bar in January 2016, also acted under inspiration from the Islamic State.

An assessment of the domestic threat level to Israel - Over the last year and as part of the Islamic State’s strategy, the organization has been encouraging new recruits to wage jihad in their home countries. A prominent example of this was the call for terrorist attacks to be carried out in the countries participating in the coalition against the Islamic State, with emphasis on France, Britain, the United States, etc. Another example can be seen in the October 2015 video published by a member of the Islamic State threatening Israel, in Hebrew.⁸ This issue reached its peak with the declaration by Abu Bakr al-Bagdadi in December 2015 in which he threatened “**to turn Palestine into a graveyard for its Jewish residents**”.⁹

It is reasonable to assume that al-Bagdadi’s call in December 2015 constituted part of this effort and, in both the short and mid-term, is likely to motivate terrorist attacks and bring new recruits to the Islamic State from among the Arab-Israeli population to carry out attacks in Israel. In this respect, Nashat Milhem acted as a “harbinger” in successfully carrying out an Islamic State-inspired terrorist attack inside Israel.

Threats against Israeli/Jewish Targets Abroad

Israeli and Jewish targets abroad serve as a relatively convenient target for global jihad organizations that want to attack Israel. Among these targets are Jewish communities abroad, with emphasis on Europe; Israeli interests such as diplomats and other Israeli state symbols, including Israeli athletes, tourists, companies, etc.

Islamic State attacks against such targets may be carried out as “lone wolf” attacks or attacks by returning foreign fighters, such as the attack at the Jewish Museum in Brussels

⁸ Gilad Shiloh. “The Media Blitz of the Islamic State against its Enemies and its Characteristics”. (in Hebrew) *Beehive: The Discourse on Social Networks in the Middle East*. Vol 4, Issue 1. Retrieved from:

http://dayan.org/he/sites/default/files/Beehive_2016_Jan_HEB.pdf

⁹ December 26, 2015. <http://www.cssn.tk/2015/12/5t.html>

(May 2014); attacks carried out together by members of the same family, such as the Kouachi brothers in Paris (January 2015); or attacks carried out by an organized cell, such as the attack in Paris in November 2015.

Threats to Specialized Systems

Threats to the aviation system

Recent incidents in the aviation arena point to the potential threat of the Islamic State in this arena, including the threat to Israel:

The bombing of the Russian plane in Egypt on October 31, 2015 caused by a bomb placed in one of the plane's seats. The intensity of the explosion was equivalent to one kilogram of TNT and caused the plane to explode, killing 224 people. The Sinai Province of the Islamic State, the organization's affiliate in Sinai, claimed responsibility for the attack. On November 18, 2015 the Islamic State published issue no. 12 of the magazine *Dabiq*, in English, which included an article that shed light on the attack and published photos of the explosive materials that it claimed caused the plane to explode.

The training of Islamic State fighters using civil flight simulators - According to reports by military officials in Libya, the Islamic State in Libya has trained fighters using civil flight simulators, including former Libyan army commanders.

These incidents reveal the intention and ability of the Islamic State and its affiliates to carry out terrorist attacks in the aviation arena. Since the State of Israel is a target of the organization, it is not immune to this threat and must combat this dimension as well.

Threats to the maritime system

On November 12, 2014 an Egyptian navy vessel was attacked approximately 70 kilometers north of the town of Damietta by three speedboats driven by Islamic State-affiliated terrorists. The attackers took control of the Navy vessel with help from one of the

commanders who had apparently defected to their ranks before the attack began. An investigation of the incident found that the mission of the kidnappers was to attack Egyptian maritime forces in the Northern Sinai as well as Israeli targets along Israel's beaches.

This incident was unprecedented in terms of its location and in terms of the threat posed to Israel in this context. The incident testifies to the presence of global jihad organizations in the Mediterranean Sea, as well as to their ability to coordinate, organize and execute an attack of this kind in the middle of the sea. The incident poses a threat to Israeli maritime traffic, Israeli Navy forces, and sensitive infrastructure that are exposed not only to threats from the shore, but in the sea as well. This capability is liable to manifest itself in maritime attacks against commercial sailing routes in the Gulf of Eilat and in attempts to attack Israeli ships, tourist ships or Navy vessels.

The maritime arena is becoming a scene of conflict with the smuggling of people and weapons, and attempts to take control of/attack naval vessels, blurring the line between terrorism and criminal activity. The naval arena is also gaining momentum in the global jihadist discourse. This manifests itself not only as mere declarations, but there exists a real threat, as both motivation and capability are present.

For Israel, the threat is likely to manifest itself in attacks on strategic targets such as drilling rigs; attacks on Navy vessels (and in certain cases even attacks on the shore); attacks on maritime trade routes; and attacks on civilian vessels.

Threats in the cyber arena

The Islamic State is among the leading jihadist organizations in the use of digital media and has some of the most advanced technological measures that enable this platform. In this framework, the organization is working to recruit or hire the services of hackers for offensive purposes, including gathering information or causing economic damage.

According to assessments, the Islamic State has the ability to carry out DDos attacks, hacking, and defacing Websites. For the most part, these activities have a low damage potential. In addition, the organization has the ability to exploit weakness in a security

system to carry out cyber-attacks and phishing attacks with the goal of gaining access to databases and/or taking control of computer systems.

The real danger is that control and monitoring systems will be breached and taken control of (such as SCADA systems). According to assessments, the organization is trying to execute such attacks against the West in order to cause significant damage to critical infrastructure.

Threat of non-conventional weapons

According to various reports, the Islamic State has access to non-conventional materials. In this context, it should be noted that there is evidence that the organization has used chemical weapons - apparently mustard gas, among other things - in July 2014 against the Kurds. In light of this, the possibility of implementing such an attack against Israel in the future should be taken into account.

Modus Operandi

Possible methods of operation by the Islamic State against Israel:

1. From Abroad - operational activities along the border and within the country, such as steep trajectory gunfire, anti-tank fire, sniper fire, penetration, kidnapping, planting explosives, ambushes, etc.;
2. Operational activities within the territory of the State of Israel;
3. Operational activities against Jewish and/or Israel targets abroad;
4. Activities in the aviation arena, including anti-aircraft fire;
5. Activities in the maritime arena via sea-coast fire, sea-sea fire, capture of ships, etc.;
6. Cyber-attacks;
7. Attacks using non-conventional weapons.

The Islamic State uses three modus operandi when attacking within a country (in the West or in Israel), which can be carried out through Islamic State-inspired attacks or through attacks that are managed and controlled by the Islamic State:

1. **“Lone wolf” attacks** - As a result of radicalization processes among some Arab-Israelis and Palestinians, we are likely to see incidents in which young people who are not directly affiliated with the Islamic State act of their own initiative, such as the attack on Dizengoff Street (January 2016). Despite the fact that the organization has no clear control over them, the process of incitement and the exposure to the organization’s content online will guide and direct these attackers. The “lone wolf” does not usually rely on organizational infrastructure but can glean assistance from the abundant amount of information on the Internet, including various types of training programs and information on assembling improvised explosive devices. These attackers are liable to carry out bombings using improvised explosives (such as the pressure cooker used in the attack on the Boston Marathon in 2013), engage on a killing spree using firearms or knife attacks, etc.
2. **Family cell attacks** - A cell based on familial ties, such as: husband and wife as in the San Bernardino attacks (2015); the Kouachi brothers in Paris (January 2015); and the Tsarnaev brothers in Boston (April 2013). In these cases, it is possible that the cell will embark on a killing spree that could include shooting firearms, throwing explosives, running people over with a vehicle, etc.
3. **Multi-participant cell** - Attacks similar to the November 2015 attack in Paris or the 2008 attack in Mumbai. The cell is likely to act simultaneously in multiple locations in one of the central cities, or even in several cities, in order to create chaos among the security forces. Such an attack could include activating an explosives belt, throwing a bomb, and shooting at passerby. In addition, hostages could also be used.

Summary and Recommendations

Global jihad organizations, including the Islamic State, are waging a simultaneous war against the “Near Enemy” and the “Far Enemy”. This war is being waged on multiple fronts: the cyber space, the physical and the psychological. It is not limited to borders, or time, or space, and as far as the Islamic State is concerned, all means justify the final goal - the establishment and expansion of the Islamic Caliphate’s borders.

With regards to Israel, the Islamic State is undergoing “strategic distress” (space/time) in Syria and Iraq, and it is very likely that in the short-term it will avoid opening a new front with Israel from Syria. Nevertheless, it seems that the organization’s leadership is focusing efforts lately on recruiting Arab-Israelis to carry out terrorist attacks on behalf of the Islamic State within Israel.

Recommendations:

Deepen academic research on the Islamic State’s infrastructure, operations and discourse with regards to Israel and the West (social networks, forums, organizational digital press, leaders’ declarations, advancement in various battlefronts, the exchange of information, etc.).

Increase intelligence gathering on the Islamic State.

Formulate dialogue on periodic forums composed of security officials and academics in order to design innovative/different practices for combating the phenomenon.

Manage the radicalization process among Israeli-Arabs while learning and drawing lessons from the attempts of others in Europe. Launch programs (such as integration, radicalization prevention, de-radicalization, de-radicalization in prison etc.) with international cooperation and internal cooperation at the level of government, civil society, Arab society, Arab-Israeli leadership, religious clerics, security officials, and more.

Apply the lessons learned of the threat from abroad and its implications for the IDF, policy makers and security officials.