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# The Growing Threat Of Terrorism In The Sinai

By Leo Labaj and Bill Schaefer



*The son (C) of Salafi Islamist Hisham al-Saadi sits next to his father's body during his funeral at a mosque in Bureil refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip October 14, 2012. Two Gaza militants killed by Israel, one of them al-Saadi, were the most senior al-Qaeda affiliates in the Palestinian enclave, with links to jihadi networks in Egypt, Jordan and Iraq, sources said. REUTERS/Mohammed Salem*



**S**ince the popular revolution that overthrew Hosni Mubarak in the early months of 2011 the world has witnessed a remarkable up swing in Salafi-Jihadist terrorism in the Sinai border region of Egypt and Israel. This violence has recently come to the attention of the general western media and US foreign policy apparatus which has declared, in the words of Secretary of State Clinton during a visit to Egypt that there is “the potential of jihadists and terrorists taking up an operational base in Sinai.” Salafi-Jihadi groups operating on the Egyptian-Israeli border create violence and destabilization that is debilitating and they are currently the most dangerous threat facing all states in the region — Egypt and Israel continue to be victims of terrorist violence, while Hamas and the citizens of Gaza continue to be delegitimized

Salafi-Jihadism is by no means a new type of Ideology, in fact it is most likely the typeset that one thinks of when thinking about Islamic Terrorism — a push back towards the principles and guidelines of life during the time of the Prophet Muhammed through the means of Jihad bis Saif, or Violent Jihad. Salafi-Jihadism is very similar to the ideology used by groups like Egyptian Islamic

to establish a Palestinian homeland, they are waging an all out International-Cosmic war in the name of Islam — Palestine is just one small battle in a very large war. Also, Salafi-Jihadi groups want to establish Sharia law in all of Palestine, and are completely comfortable using violent force against their own people to achieve these ends. This means the democratic approach taken by Hamas, Fatah,

recent years — since the battle of Gaza in 2007 — Salafi-Jihadi groups began operating completely independent of Hamas, and have now emerged as an alternative to the Movement. Operations like the kidnapping of Alan Johnston and the assassination plot against Tony Blair were conducted without Hamas’ knowledge, and were designed, in fact, to embarrass and delegitimize it. Aside

Since 2009 Hamas has spent a considerable amount of effort targeting and neutralizing Salafi-Jihadi groups — and frankly they have done a relatively good job. However, one group has been able to survive this brutal crackdown; they have remained operational — in fact they have only strengthened in numbers, support and organizational prowess. The group, Jeish Al Islam, has emerged as

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Jihad, and more famously Al-Qaeda. But, only since 2005 have we seen Salafi-Jihadi groups emerge as factors in the Palestinian struggle for statehood, as the Struggle has been dominated by Secular-Nationalist groups (PLO), Marxist-Nationalist groups (PFLP), and Islamic-Nationalist groups (Hamas). This is what differentiates Salafi-Jihadi groups from mainstream Palestinian statehood movements; they are not fighting Israel in order

and Egypt is seen by these groups as un-Islamic. To them Egypt, Hamas, Fatah, and Israel are all the same enemy.

The first Salafi-Jihadi groups emerged around 2005 after the Israeli withdrawal of Gaza, and worked side by side with Hamas on operations, like the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit, but these groups were small, fractured and remained on the sidelines — perfectly happy to follow the lead of Hamas. However, in

from targeting the West and Israel, the Salafi-Jihadi groups attacked Palestinian business inside Gaza they deemed as too western. The schism between Hamas and the Salafi-Jihadi groups came to a point in 2009 when Jund Ansar Allah, a Salafi-Jihadi group, declared Rafah to be an Islamic Emirate. This prompted a violent crack down by Hamas that included an attack on a Mosque that held spiritual leaders of the Salafi-Jihadi movement.

the most dangerous terrorist group operating in Gaza.

Jeish Al Islam was one of the first Salafi-Jihadi groups to emerge on the scene in 2006. A small team most likely lead by the group’s founder Mumtaz Dughmash infiltrated into Israel by way of underground tunnels and emerged above ground just across the border from the Karem Shalom crossing. They attacked an IDF post from the rear, during the fire-fight two



members of the attack team were killed along with two members of the IDF. The team managed to grab one of the wounded IDF soldiers and drag him back across the Israeli border. The group from Jeish Al Islam then turned over the soldier, Gilad Shalit over the Hamas authorities who held him until his release in 2011. Several weeks after the kidnapping, after announcing their establishment on online Jihadi forums, they struck again kidnapping two journalists. Within a matter of weeks

have dominated for decades. The Dughmash clan made its money and power through various activities both legal and illegal; they raised livestock and traded and controlled a lucrative transportation business. On the side, they extorted local businesses and smuggled arms and drugs, and were involved in enough illegal activities to earn them the nickname "The Sopranos of Gaza City". Mumtaz started out working in a prison under Muhammed Dahlan in Preventative Security. After reaching the



*The son of Salafi Islamist Hisham al-Saedni mourns during his father's funeral in Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip October 14, 2012. Two Gaza militants killed by Israel, one of them al-Saedni, were the most senior al Qaeda affiliates in the Palestinian enclave, with links to jihadi networks in Egypt, Jordan and Iraq, sources said. REUTERS/Mohammed Salem*

they had become a major player in the Gaza resistance landscape.

Little is known about the founder of the group Mumtaz Dughmash, and much of what is available is riddled with rumors and hearsay. However, he was born in Gaza City in the neighborhood of Sabra. A neighborhood his family, the Dughmash clan,

rank of First Sergeant, he left to join Hamas. He soon left Hamas as well in order to work for the Popular Resistance Committees. He first drew attention to himself after an attempted assassination of the Gaza Police chief. After quickly working through the ranks, he gathered a large following of members and the trust of his leaders. Anonymous

sources claim that he personally carried out the assassination of Moussa Arafat and the kidnapping of Manhal Arafat. Shortly before the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit, he left the PRC to establish his own group, drawing recruits from his time in PRC, Hamas, and from his relatives in the Dughmash clan.

After the Battle of Gaza, Jeish Al-Islam moved to take advantage of a weakened Hamas, the result was all out gun fights throughout the streets of Gaza City. In addition, Jeish Al-Islam kidnapped BBC journalist Alan Johnston. This operation was designed to embarrass Hamas and show the true loyalties of the Jeish; as the ransom was not a demand for the release of Palestinian prisoners, but rather the release of an Al-Qaeda affiliated cleric held in London. The Jeish continued their activities focusing mostly inward — attacking a co-ed school and bombing a YMCA. But their constant fighting with Hamas led them to become it's number one target, and the subsequent crackdown decimated Jeish Al-Islam's ranks.

Only a year and a half ago did Jeish Al-Islam finally make a resurgence. On New Year's Eve 2011 they bombed a Coptic church in Alexandria that left 23 people dead. A few months later they kidnapped and murdered Italian peace worker Vittorio Arrigoni. Then, the revolution in Egypt and Libya created the perfect situation for a terrorist group.

The already lawless Sinai region became a security vacuum, the police abandoned their posts, and because of treaties between Egypt and Israel the Egyptian military cannot patrol the Sinai. The bedouin of the Sinai have long been marginalized in Egyptian society and exposed the Salafi ideas. And with the

Sinai's vast desert and cave filled mountains it provides a perfect place to headquarter a Salafi-Jihadi terrorist cell. On top of that, the influx of weapons from the Libyan revolution has spilled over into Egypt where one can buy a AK-74 for a few thousand Egyptian Pounds, has allowed Salafi groups to arm themselves to the teeth.

It was only a matter of time for this perfect storm to hit land, and it did this summer. On August 6th, militants from Jeish Al-Islam attacked the Rafah border crossing manned by the Egyptian military, they killed 16 Egyptian soldiers before trying to cross the border into Israel. The Egyptian military quickly moved to neutralize any remaining Salafi-Jihadi cells in the Sinai. But reports by journalists un-affiliated with state run newspapers claim the security sweep was poorly run and did little to stop terrorist operations.

The Sinai is still the perfect storm for terrorist operations, as discontent with Hamas and Israel grow and as the Bedouins of the Sinai continue to be marginalized in society the strength and influence of Jeish Al-Islam will grow as well. And they will remain one of the most dangerous terrorist groups in the Middle East.

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