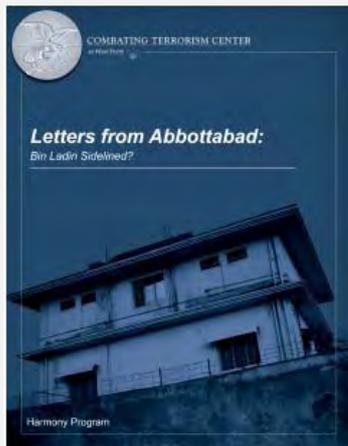




A document captured by the United States army at Bin Laden's hideout in Pakistan reveals connections between the Al-Qaeda leadership and the Army of Islam, a Salafi-jihadist organization based in the Gaza Strip



Right: the Arabic text of the letter from the Army of Islam captured at Bin Laden's hideout.
Left: the CTC's analysis of the letters.

Overview

1. On May 3, 2012, one year after Osama Bin Laden was killed by an elite Navy SEAL team, the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at the United States Military Academy (West Point, NY) published 17 declassified documents captured at Bin Laden's hideout in Abbottabad, Pakistan. The documents, published under the title "Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Laden Sidelined?", were made available in complete English translation accompanied by an analysis of the information contained therein.¹
2. The 17 documents published constitute a very small selection from 6,000 documents captured on computers and hard drives taken from the compound where Osama Bin Laden was hiding in Abbottabad. The documents, the earliest of

¹ The original documents can be found at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/letters-from-abbottabad-bin-laden-sidelined>. For the analysis, see http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/CTC_LtrsFromAbottabad_WEB_v2.pdf

which is dated September 2006 and the latest April 2011, include letters and draft letters written by Osama Bin Laden and other Al-Qaeda leaders.

3. One of the documents, apparently written in 2006, reveals correspondence between the Army of Islam, a Gaza Strip-based global jihad organization affiliated with Al-Qaeda, and the Al-Qaeda leadership. The correspondence focuses on the question of whether the Army of Islam is permitted by Islamic religious law **to accept funding for its terrorist activities from other Palestinian organizations** (e.g., the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Fatah) **and, by implication, from such “infidel” countries as Shi’ite Iran** (which, according to the Army of Islam, provides generous financial assistance to the PIJ). Al-Qaeda answered in the affirmative, i.e., **that Islam permits the acceptance of money from other organizations and infidel countries for the purposes of jihad** (a practice employed by the PIJ) (see **Appendix I** for details on the correspondence).
4. **The Army of Islam** is a Gaza Strip-based Salafi-jihadist organization that has **considerable operative capabilities** compared to similar networks affiliated with Al-Qaeda. Established in the beginning of 2006, the organization is led by **Mumtaz Dughmush**, a member of an influential Gaza Strip clan. Two Army of Islam operatives took part in the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. The organization is notable for its efforts to carry out terrorist attacks against Israel **via the Sinai Peninsula**; in addition, **it conducts activities against Western and Egyptian targets reminiscent of those conducted by the global jihad**. In the past, the Army of Islam was accused by the then Egyptian interior minister of responsibility for a terrorist attack against the Coptic church in Alexandria (January 2011) and the Khan el-Khalili market in Cairo (February 2009). **The Army of Islam has a close relationship with Hamas**, giving it ample freedom of action on the Gaza Strip scene and on the Egyptian scene (see **Appendix II** for details).
5. As already mentioned, the “case study” that motivated the Army of Islam’s question to Al-Qaeda **was the close relationship between the PIJ and Iran**. According to one of the letters sent by the Army of Islam, the (Sunni Muslim) PIJ receives considerable financial assistance from “infidel” Shi’ite Iran **for its jihadist activities**, which has even led some of its operatives (“perish the thought”, the letter said) to adopt the Shi’ite school of thought. In practice, Iran does provide the PIJ with **generous military and financial assistance**, which has turned it into the second strongest organization in the Gaza Strip (after Hamas). In exchange for the assistance, **the PIJ, not bound by the kind of constraints placed upon Hamas**,

is ready to promote Iran's interests in the conflict with Israel and on the interior Palestinian scene.

Appendix I

The correspondence between the Army of Islam and Al-Qaeda

Overview

6. One of the documents² captured by the United States army exposes a correspondence between the Army of Islam and the Al-Qaeda leadership. The letter composed by the Army of Islam was apparently sent in 2006, shortly after the organization had come into existence. It was answered in October-November 2006. The letter was addressed to **Atiyyatullah**, a codename for an Al-Qaeda leader close to Bin Laden.³ In the letter, the Army of Islam asks Atiyyatullah, an authority on Islamic religious law and a senior member of the Al-Qaeda leadership, to answer three questions pertaining to **the funding of the activities conducted by the Army of Islam**. The answers given by Atiyyatullah were forwarded to a person named **Abd al-Hamid**, apparently a top Al-Qaeda operative, and to Osama Bin Laden, in whose residence the document was found.



The opening lines of the letter sent by the Army of Islam to Al-Qaeda

² The number given to the document by the CTC is SOCOM-2012-0000008-HT.

³ <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/364/174.html>. According to the analysis conducted by the CTC based on the 17 documents, the real name of **Atiyyatullah**, known by the alias **Abu Abd al-Rahman** and **Sheik Mahmoud**, is **Jamal Ibrahim Ishtwi al-Misrati**. He was born in 1970 in Misrata, Libya. He pursued Islamic religious studies in Mauritania, then joined jihad in Algeria. He went to Afghanistan in the late 1990s and **was killed in a drone strike in Pakistan on August 22, 2011**. According to the CTC, Atiyyatullah, rather than Ayman al-Zawahiri, as is commonly thought, **was the closest person to Bin Laden** (see p. 5, footnote 5 in the CTC document).

The questions and answers

7. **The following are the three questions on the funding of the Army of Islam addressed to Atiyyatullah and the answers he gave:**

a. **First question:** is the Army of Islam allowed to receive funding from other organizations to help it in its jihad activities (i.e., for the organization's terrorist activities)?

1. In this context, the petitioner gives the example of two organizations that receive assistance from other elements that offered financial assistance to the Army of Islam. The first is the **PIJ, which receives such large sums of money from outside sources, particularly from Iran**, that some of its operatives have embraced the Shi'ite school of thought ("perish the thought", the original says). The petitioner notes that **the PIJ offered funding to the Army of Islam in exchange for cooperation in "quality operations"**. He adds that the idea behind the offer is that **the Army of Islam would carry out terrorist attacks using funding provided by the PIJ**, after which it would be publicly announced that the two organizations had cooperated in the terrorist attack.

2. The second organization is **Fatah** (i.e., in the Gaza Strip), which also **offered funding to the Army of Islam** to support its jihad activities. However, according to the Army of Islam, there was a hidden agenda behind the offer, particularly Fatah operatives' concerns over becoming targets for the Army of Islam in internal Gaza Strip struggles (i.e., the purpose of the assistance offer was to provide Fatah with immunity of sorts).

3. The letter stated that the funding offered by the two organizations would go towards **acquiring and manufacturing weapons and supporting operations** (meaning terrorist attacks). The petitioner notes that the reason why the Army of Islam is interested in taking up the offer was the **feeling of suffocation** it experienced as a result of the siege laid by the Jews as well as by **Palestinian organizations, particularly Hamas. The petitioner said that Hamas was concerned about the possibility of the Army of Islam becoming more powerful and influential in the Gaza Strip.**

Atiyyatullah's response:

1. In the beginning of his response, Atiyyatullah notes that the question leads one to believe that **the Army of Islam seeks to gain legitimacy for accepting the financial assistance they were offered by other organizations.** To answer the question, Atiyyatullah said, it is necessary to take into consideration a number of technical details about the nature of the funding, and whether or not the money can be used. It is also necessary to consider the interest in accepting the funding, and whether the funding is legitimate or corrupt under Islamic religious law.

2. Atiyyatullah goes on to say that, in principle, accepting money is permissible as long as there are no other reasons that prohibit its acceptance under Islamic religious law. According to Atiyyatullah, there are two kinds of money that cannot be accepted: **the first kind** is money paid for wine (which Muslims are not allowed to drink), pork, or other meat that Muslims are prohibited from consuming. **The second kind** is money obtained by illegal or forbidden means. In addition, the respondent says, it should be examined whether the results of using the money can humiliate Muslims, bring them under the control of infidels, or strengthen the infidels, in which case the use of the money is obviously forbidden.

3. The respondent goes on to say that, before giving a final answer it is necessary to examine how urgent it is to receive the assistance and look into the situation of the organization interested in the funding. Atiyyatullah says that, considering the details he has been presented with, it is clear that **those who sent the letter** (i.e., the Army of Islam) **are in urgent need of financial assistance for jihad.** Accordingly, the respondent says, **it is acceptable to follow the example provided by the case study of the PIJ - an organization which receives financial assistance from Iran, even though the respondent considers it to be an "infidel" Shi'ite country.**⁴ He rules that, in principle, **Islam allows Muslims to accept funds from "infidel countries and [infidel] kings", as long as it is not otherwise prohibited.**

⁴ As is the norm in Al-Qaeda's ideology, the respondent refers to Iran by the derogatory term *rafida*—"one who rejects", which means that Iran rejects the legitimacy of three out of the four first caliphs in Islam (Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman).

4. The respondent goes on to tell the Army of Islam the following: **“If you are currently unable to support yourselves financially by legitimate means... then accepting funds from other organizations—for instance, from several Islamic organizations such as Hamas and the PIJ, or even nationalist movements [referring to Fatah] which cooperate with you in hitting the Jewish enemy—to be used for jihad and against the Jews—is better than abandoning jihad due to financial difficulties”**.

5. The respondent also clarifies the rationale behind his ruling, saying that, **even if the PIJ, Hamas, and even Fatah exploit the terrorist attacks to be perpetrated by the Army of Islam for their own benefit** (a possibility which the Army of Islam finds troublesome), it will be **“less harmful than abandoning the fight against the Jews...”** However, if at some point “Allah clears your path and you are able to financially support yourselves without needing them [i.e., these Palestinian organizations], then you must abandon them and act independently on the path you choose for yourselves, and which was given to you by Allah”.

b. **Second question:** Is it permissible to invest in the stock exchange, buy or sell stocks with the purpose of supporting jihad, or invest money that comes from stock exchange profits?

Atiyyatullah’s response:

1. Contrary to the detailed answer to the first question, the respondent admits that he has no knowledge whatsoever on the subject of the question, and that he is therefore **not qualified to provide a professional reply**. He explains his general approach by saying that “the ruling about this question depends on the circumstances and regulations of the abovementioned stock exchanges. I know nothing about the circumstances and regulations of these money markets that would allow me to talk about them with any degree of authority.”

2. He notes, however (apparently drawing on his general knowledge) that “the sales methods [of stock exchanges] involve many complications and are rife with deception, and it is beyond my power [to answer] this question.” He therefore advises the Army of Islam to ask experts who are knowledgeable in

the issue, but only “after you have carefully formulated your question and explained the circumstances and regulations of the stock exchange where you can trade. May Allah grant you success and assistance.”⁵

c. **Third question:** Is it permissible **to harm drug traffickers, kill them, and take their drug money?** Also, can drugs taken from smugglers be used for the following purposes:

1. **Luring drug addicts** into becoming double agents to work against the Jews.
2. **Selling drugs to Jews to harm them and take their money.**
3. **Eliminating Jewish soldiers**, particularly border guards, **using drugs.**

Atiyyatullah’s response:

1. **When it comes to harming and killing drug traffickers, the answer is affirmative.** One’s actions with regard to this issue should be guided by the well-known fundamental Islamic principle of “the commandment of doing good and abstaining from evil”. What is more, jihad fighters (mujahedeen) wherever they are need to make sure that they can enforce the penal code of Islamic religious law (*hudud*).⁶

2. The respondent explains that the areas where the penal code is enforced by jihad fighters are Iraq, Afghanistan, Waziristan, and other places. However, he qualifies his statement by saying that the petitioners are still not in a situation where they can enforce Islamic religious law (probably because they do not have any territory under their control). Accordingly, he advises them not to enforce Islamic religious law since they may find themselves “in a situation which they don’t know how to deal with” while they are still weak.

3. However, the respondent notes, **the money of drug traffickers can be taken “in a very limited number of cases, if at all.”** According to

⁵ The authors of the CTC report argue (p. 22, footnote 77) that Atiyyatullah’s refusal to answer questions on stock exchange investments due to his lack of expertise may indicate that he wanted to maintain a cordial but distant relationship with the Army of Islam. It is our opinion, however, that, in the absence of other information, this conclusion is not necessarily correct. **First**, the respondent answered the question with a great deal of honesty and even offered the Army of Islam an alternative. **Second**, he gave them instructions on formulating their question so that it could be posed to someone who may not necessarily sympathize with their worldview or with the reason for their wish to invest in the stock exchange. At any rate, unlike the first question, which carries a practical and concrete character, it appears that **this question is very theoretical for a small Gaza Strip terrorist organization that is just starting out.**

⁶ **Hudud**, in Islamic religious law, refers to the gravest of offenses, the punishment for which cannot be reversed or reduced.

Atiyyatullah, if the Army of Islam comes upon and captures a drug trafficker, **it can take his money, but not the drugs he has in his possession, and use it for financing jihad.** He qualifies his statement by saying that this is only permissible where it does not result in the increase of corruption, which is the guiding principle.

4. Accordingly, he rules that **“if their [the drug traffickers’] money** comes from different sources [that is, not only from selling drugs], **it can indeed be used, but only that portion of the money which did not come from selling drugs.** Furthermore, **if the drug traffickers give away their money as a donation for waging a jihad for the sake of Allah, “then I believe... that the money can be used”** only for financing the aforementioned jihad.

5. Given the problems inherent in this issue, it is evident that the respondent’s answer **is worded with a great deal of caution, in the form of a recommendation rather than an unambiguous ruling.** He explains the condition governing his approval: since the money comes from a prohibited source, its owners must repent for their actions and transfer the money they have received from engaging in such unlawful business to the treasury of the state, “where it is used for the benefit of [all] Muslims, including for [financing] jihad and conquering [territories] in Allah’s name”, or give the money to charity. However, if the owner of the money does not repent for his actions and continues to commit sins, it is the duty of a top Muslim authority to hold him accountable. In this case, the sinner’s money can be confiscated, a view shared by most experts on Islamic religious law.

6. The respondent qualifies his answer by saying that some experts on Islamic religious law oppose such practices and believe that the money should be destroyed since it comes from unlawful activity. He disagrees with them, however, saying that it is “a rather weak” ruling. **In his view, Allah has never decreed that such money be destroyed, only that “it must not be wasted”.** Therefore, destroying the money would be the same as wasting it, hence it would be better for it to end up in the treasury of the Islamic state, like the money collected as fines given to those who break the law.

7. **The bottom line** of Atiyyatullah's response is: **"If a liquor trader or drug trafficker** donates some of the money he has to finance jihad for the sake of Allah, **it can be accepted and used to [finance] jihad for the sake of Allah.** At the same time, efforts must be made to persuade him and all human beings to obey Allah and repent for his/their actions by refraining from evil deeds and engaging in no more forbidden deeds. Care must be taken not to assist him in trafficking drugs [as long as he remains involved in this activity], which is forbidden".

Summary

8. The correspondence shows that, **already in 2006, in the early days of the Army of Islam, the organization associated itself with Al-Qaeda, even if only on the basis of ideology and religion.** The authors of the CTC analysis note that it is impossible to fully understand the relationship between Al-Qaeda and some of the organizations affiliated with it, including the Army of Islam, based on the 17 declassified documents.⁷ However, given Atiyyatullah's senior position in the Al-Qaeda leadership, the correspondence indicates the beginning of an ideological relationship between them. At any rate, **obvious global jihad characteristics have been observed in the Army of Islam's pattern of activity** in the five years that have passed since the time of the correspondence.
9. In 2006, at the time the letter was written, **the Army of Islam cooperated in one way or another with the PIJ and Fatah.** Its relationship with Hamas at the time was still cordial yet tense, as implied in the letter. This was reflected in the organization's cooperation with Hamas and the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) in the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit, on June 25, 2006. Later, the relationship between the Army of Islam and Hamas **grew sour** due to the former organization's affiliation with the global jihad, which meant that it **carried out terrorist attacks outside the framework of Hamas' policy, which may have been its motivation to approach Al-Qaeda. The tensions between the Army of Islam and Hamas could be clearly seen in 2007,** when the Army of Islam kidnapped Alan Johnston, a BBC journalist, who was eventually rescued by Hamas after a violent confrontation with the abductors.

⁷ See p. 3 of the analysis.

10. **Atiyyatullah did not offer the Army of Islam the assistance of Al-Qaeda, and was not asked to do so.** Perhaps this had to do with the fact that, at the time, the Army of Islam was a newcomer, recently-established organization, and that Al-Qaeda did not have enough information on its operative capabilities and the support it had in the Gaza Strip. **Accordingly, Al-Qaeda merely gave answers which provided the Army of Islam with some leeway in using other funding sources of organizations** (including one assisted by Iran) **and drug trafficking groups.** However, one cannot rule out the possibility that, once the Army of Islam proved its operative capabilities, **its practical relationship with Al-Qaeda grew to include more than just guidance in matters of Islamic religious law.**

Appendix II

A profile of the Army of Islam

Overview



Right: the emblem of the Army of Islam: a Quran with a sword bearing the *shahada* [“There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Prophet”], and the map of the world in the background. Left: Army of Islam operatives in Gaza (<http://vb.n4hr.com/125584.html>)

11. A number of Salafi-jihadist⁸ networks affiliated with Al-Qaeda and global jihad organizations began thriving in the Gaza Strip under the Hamas administration. The most prominent is the Army of Islam, established in early 2006. The organization is headed by **Mumtaz Dughmush**, a member of an influential clan in the Gaza Strip, based in the Gaza City neighborhood of Al-Sabra. In early 2006 Mumtaz Dughmush seceded from the PRC along with his supporters and established the Army of Islam, which was later joined by operatives who had left the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the Hamas military wing. The goal of the Army of Islam is the liberation of Palestine through jihad and attacks on Western and Arab targets (Egypt).

⁸ **Salafiyya** is an Islamic school which preaches that the religious behavior of the first generations of Islam should be an example for all Muslims. In recent decades Salafiyya has gone from a conservative (fundamentalist) Islamic school of thought to a radical political ideology espoused by extremist Islamic elements working on the regional and international scene (including Al-Qaeda).



Mumtaz Dughmush, the founder and leader of the Army of Islam (right), with one of the organization's members (Hamas forum, January 24, 2007)

12. The Army of Islam is currently considered **the most dominant of the Gaza Strip-based groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and global jihad**. Two Army of Islam operatives took part in the June 2006 kidnapping of Gilad Shalit at Kerem Shalom, and it was then that the organization's name first appeared in public. Since the end of Operation Cast Lead, the organization has tried to carry out attacks against Israeli and foreign targets, particularly Israelis staying in the Sinai Peninsula. In recent years the Army of Islam has adopted a modus operandi strongly reminiscent of global jihad organizations, such as abducting Western journalists and attacking Western-style recreation sites, such as internet cafés, in the Gaza Strip.
13. Similarly to other groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda, **the Army of Islam considers Egypt a target for its terrorist activity**. In January 2011, the (outgoing) Egyptian Interior Minister, and then the Egyptian media, accused the Army of Islam of involvement in a multi-casualty terrorist attack at a Coptic church in Alexandria (25 people were killed and many dozens were injured in the attack). Army of Islam operatives in the Gaza Strip were accused of orchestrating terrorist attacks in Egypt on Al-Qaeda's behalf, and having contact with terrorist operatives in the Gaza Strip through the tunnels (which, according to Egypt's outgoing interior minister, are a threat to Egypt's "national security"). The Army of Islam was also accused of being involved in other terrorist attacks carried out in Egypt in recent years, including a terrorist attack in Cairo's El-Khalili market in which a French tourist was killed (February 22, 2009).

14. Due to its terrorist activity against Israeli targets, **the Army of Islam has been the target of Israeli targeted killings. Muhammad Jamal al-Nimnim**, one of the leaders of the organization, was attacked and killed by an Israeli aircraft while driving his car on November 3, 2010. Al-Nimnim, a resident of the Shati refugee camp, **was involved in carrying out terrorist attacks in the Gaza Strip as well as in planning terrorist attacks against Israeli and American targets in the Sinai Peninsula, with the cooperation of Hamas elements in the Gaza Strip** (IDF Spokesman, November 3, 2010). On November 17, 2010, **Islam Yassin**, an Army of Islam operative and the organization leader's right-hand man, was attacked by Israel. Islam Yassin and his brother were killed in the air strike.

The ideology of the Army of Islam and its affiliation with global jihad

15. The Army of Islam is a Salafi Muslim organization whose ideology is inspired by Al-Qaeda and global jihad organizations. The organization's objective is to liberate Palestine and establish there an Islamic state by waging jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders (i.e., the West). The organization seeks to have the Gaza Strip undergo a quick process of Islamization while posing an ideological challenge to the Hamas administration and violating its policy of terrorist attacks.
16. On June 3, 2011, the Egyptian daily Al-Yoom published an interview with a person who identified himself as Abu al-Baraa, a major operative and co-founder of the Army of Islam in the Gaza Strip. He said that the organization subscribes to Al-Qaeda's ideology, but that it only accepts the idea of jihad insofar as it concerns the war against the Jews, not Al-Qaeda's global jihad. He did admit, however, that also "other ideas" had penetrated the organization (MEMRI, June 22, 2011). In practice, the Army of Islam was involved in terrorist attacks against Western and Egyptian targets, in contradiction of Hamas' terrorist policy (see below).
17. **In May 2011 a spokesman of the U.S. State Department announced that the Army of Islam was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.** According to the announcement, it is a Palestinian organization that subscribes to the ideology of global jihad, whose operatives perpetrated such terrorist acts as firing rockets from Egypt on Israel, terrorist attacks in Egypt, kidnapping two Fox News reporters, and kidnapping the British journalist Alan Johnston. According to the announcement, the organization combines "the Salafist ideology of global jihad with

the traditional model of armed Palestinian resistance". In this context, **the organization had previously worked with Hamas and was attempting to develop closer contacts with Al-Qaeda** (U.S. Department of State website, May 20, 2011).

Terrorist attacks in which the Army of Islam was involved

Overview

18. **The Army of Islam has strong military capabilities compared with other Salafi-jihadist networks in the Gaza Strip**, and apparently possesses large quantities of weapons. In addition to ongoing terrorist attacks (such as rocket fire into Israel), the organization has adopted the modus operandi of the global jihad. That includes the kidnapping of foreign nationals and attacks on recreation sites in the Gaza Strip, such as Internet cafés, which violate, it claims, Islamic morality. In June 2006 the Army of Islam collaborated with Hamas in kidnapping IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. **It was also involved in a number of terrorist attacks in Egyptian territory. After Operation Cast Lead, the Army of Islam attempted to carry out a number of showcase attacks against Israel and foreign targets, including in the Sinai Peninsula.**

Notable terrorist attacks

19. The first terrorist attack for which the Army of Islam claimed responsibility was the one in June 2006 in which Gilad Shalit was kidnapped, and in which two of its operatives took part. However, the organization's operatives were also involved in earlier attacks. The following are terrorist attacks in which the organization and its operatives were involved, some when they were still part of the PRC:
 - a. **September 7, 2005.** Moussa Arafat, Yasser Arafat's nephew and the head of the Palestinian military intelligence, was murdered at his residence. The murder was perpetrated by the PRC, headed by Mumtaz Dughmush, with the assistance of Hamas. It was a premeditated political assassination **planned by the Hamas movement**, which had turned the PRC into something of a terrorist subcontractor.
 - b. **June 25, 2006.** Army of Islam operatives took part in the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit, a terrorist attack in which two Israeli soldiers were killed. The Army of Islam

is one of the three organizations which claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier, the other organizations being Hamas and the PRC.

c. **August 14, 2006.** Two **Fox News** correspondents, one from the United States and the other from New Zealand, **were kidnapped in the Gaza Strip**. They were forced out of their car, bound, and taken to a garage. After being held in captivity for two weeks, they were freed by the Palestinian security forces, transferred to the Erez crossing, and once there, taken to Israel.

d. **March 12, 2007.** BBC reporter **Alan Johnston** was kidnapped in Gaza City by four gunmen who ambushed his car. About two months later, on May 8, 2007, the Army of Islam claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and sent a video tape with its ransom demands to the Al-Jazeera TV offices in Gaza. The recorded statement was aired by the Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyya TV channels on May 9, 2007, as well as on Al-Firdaws, an online forum affiliated with Al-Qaeda (Al-Firdaws, May 9, 2007). The statement employed radical Islamic terminology such as that used by Al-Qaeda and its affiliated global jihad elements. Some four months later, in July 2007, Alan Johnston was released as a result of pressure exerted on the Army of Islam by Hamas.



Right: Alan Johnston's journalist card (Al-Arabiyya TV, May 10, 2007). Left: a tape sent by the Army of Islam showing BBC reporter Alan Johnston wearing an explosive belt and presenting the organization's ransom demands (Al-Arabiyya TV, June 25, 2007)

e. **April 15, 2011.** An Italian reporter named Vittorio Arrigoni, an activist of the ISM (an anti-Israeli organization based in the United States) was kidnapped and murdered in the Gaza Strip. His kidnapers released a video tape where he was

seen bleeding, and demanded that, in exchange for his release, Hamas release one of the apprehended leaders of the Army of Islam. His kidnapping and murder were attributed to the Army of Islam.

20. The Army of Islam was also involved in planning several terrorist attacks that were later thwarted:

a. **July 15, 2008.** According to the Israel Security Agency, the organization planned to attack Middle East envoy Tony Blair during his visit to the Gaza Strip. Tony Blair canceled his visit to the Gaza Strip after Israel's Defense Minister Ehud Barak alerted him to the security threat (ynet, July 15, 2008).

b. **October 2010.** According to media reports, the organization was planning to kidnap Israelis or foreigners vacationing in the Sinai Peninsula, but the plan was apparently foiled by the deaths of three senior operatives in an Israeli Air Force raid in the northern Gaza Strip (November 3, 2010). The highest-ranking operative among those who were killed, Muhammad al-Nimnim, a resident of the Shati refugee camp, **was involved in terrorist attacks carried out in the Gaza Strip. He was also involved in planning terrorist attacks against Israelis and Americans in the Sinai Peninsula in collaboration with Hamas operatives in the Gaza Strip** (IDF Spokesman, November 3, 2010).

Terrorist attacks in Egypt attributed to the Army of Islam

21. The Army of Islam's operatives were also accused of being involved in a number of terrorist attacks in Egyptian territory. The following terrorist attacks were attributed to Army of Islam operatives:⁹

a. **January 1, 2011.** Habib El Adly, Egypt's interior minister, accused the Army of Islam of **the terrorist attack on the Coptic church in Alexandria. The attack, carried out on New Year's Eve, January 1, 2011, killed 25 civilians and injured many dozens.** On that occasion, the Egyptian media accused the Army of Islam of involvement in several other terrorist attacks that had taken place in Egyptian territory in previous years. The interior minister said that the

⁹ For more information, see our February 2, 2011 Information Bulletin: "Exporting terrorism and subversion from the Gaza Strip: in our assessment terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip may exploit the recent events to increase arms smuggling and infiltrate operatives into Egypt. The Gaza-based jihadist Army of Islam has already been accused of the attack on the Coptic church in Alexandria".

information on the terrorist attack came after the arrest of an Egyptian Al-Qaeda operative named Ahmed Lutfi Ibrahim, who was involved in the terrorist attack on the Coptic church and was in contact with an Al-Qaeda squad which was exposed before it took place. **During interrogation, he revealed his involvement in terrorist attacks in Egypt and his ties to the Army of Islam in the Gaza Strip.** In response, a senior Army of Islam operative calling himself Abu Khattab claimed that his organization did not operate on Egyptian soil, and that it was an Israeli “conspiracy” intended to mobilize support for a new war against Gaza (Egyptian TV, January 23, 2011; Al-Resalah, January 23, 2011).



The site of the suicide bombing attack at the Coptic church in Alexandria (Al-Yawm Al-Saba'a website, January 3, 2011)

b. **February 22, 2009.** Egypt's outgoing interior minister accused the Army of Islam of being involved in a terrorist attack in the Khan El Khalili bazaar in Cairo, which killed a French woman and injured at least twenty people (Al-Quds al-Arabi, June 12, 2011).

c. **February 2011.** Egyptian “security sources” reported that Army of Islam operatives were apparently involved in **a number of terrorist attacks carried out during that month in the northern Sinai Peninsula**, including blowing up a building belonging to Egypt's security investigation apparatus in **Al-Arish** (February 4), **blowing up the pipeline** which transports gas from Egypt to Jordan (February 5), and blowing up a church in **Rafah** (February 6) (Al-Ahram, February 6, 2011; Masrawi, February 6, 2011).

The relationship between the Army of Islam and Hamas

22. The relationship between Hamas and the Army of Islam (and other similar Salafi-jihadist networks) is complex and has had its share of ups and downs. **On one hand**, Hamas and the Army of Islam share a common radical Islamic ideology. Hamas fears that dealing with them aggressively is liable to result in internal criticism from the radical Islamic followers, even those who support Hamas. In addition, Hamas has made use of the organization's operative capabilities (and cooperated with it in the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit). **On the other hand**, Hamas feels threatened by the increased activity and influence of the global jihad organizations in the Gaza Strip and elsewhere, which have the potential to complicate its relations with Israel, Egypt, and the West.
23. **At its inception, the Army of Islam had a close relationship with Hamas**, which attempted to monitor the organization's activity and have it follow its policy of terrorist attacks. It is possible that Hamas' tolerance towards the Army of Islam was the result of the two organizations' past of operative cooperation. Hamas therefore avoided implementing effective restraining measures against the Army of Islam (the way it did with another Salafi-jihadist network, the Army of Allah's Supporters, in the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque incident). Later on, however, **tensions appeared between the two organizations, which sometimes even escalated to violent clashes**. At times, Hamas attempted to confront the organization, and on a number of occasions **did not hesitate to use military force against it, particularly to thwart terrorist activity which did not coincide with its own policy**. Hamas even attempted to portray its measures against the Army of Islam as police activity intended to "maintain security and public order".¹⁰
24. For instance, on September 15, 2008, **violent clashes took place in the Al-Sabra neighborhood** in the western part of Gaza City **between Hamas security forces and members of the Dughmush clan**, the main force behind the Army of Islam. The clashes broke out as a result of an attempt by the security forces to arrest two wanted clan members. Eleven clan members were killed and 46 were injured in the clashes. Also killed was a police officer of Hamas' security forces, and another

¹⁰ For details, see our September 1, 2009 Information Bulletin: "Hamas steps up its struggle against the global jihad-affiliated networks trying to challenge its control of the Gaza Strip. Hamas recently used extreme force to suppress global jihad operatives, one of whose leaders proclaimed the establishment of an Islamic emirate in the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque in Rafah."

police officer was injured. A number of Army of Islam operatives were among those killed or injured in the clashes.



Weapons seized by Hamas security forces during the clashes with the Dughmush clan (the photographs appeared on the website of the Palestinian police in the Gaza Strip, the Al-Aqsa TV website, and the Hamas PALDF forum, September 16, 2008)

25. **Hamas currently has a close relationship with the Army of Islam**, unlike with other global jihad organizations in the Gaza Strip that are persecuted by Hamas' security forces. **The Army of Islam has a vested interest in maintaining the relationship**, since it understands that this relationship provides it with **freedom of action both on the Gaza Strip scene and on the Egyptian scene**, without having to incur the restraining measures taken by Hamas.

Possible involvement of the Army of Islam in exporting terrorism from the Gaza Strip

26. In view of the regional upheaval and the governmental chaos in the Sinai Peninsula, local Gaza Strip organizations with a jihadist orientation, such as the Army of Islam, **may attempt to influence other scenes in the Middle East**.
27. For instance, the Army of Islam may attempt to act on the **Egyptian scene**, which, following the fall of the Mubarak regime and the lawlessness of the Sinai Peninsula, **has become a convenient hotbed of terrorist activity** (as already mentioned, the Army of Islam is experienced in carrying out terrorist attacks in Egypt and planning attacks in the Sinai Peninsula). Furthermore, it is our assessment that elements in the Army of Islam may also seek to take part in the **struggle against**

the Syrian regime (in this context, it is worth mentioning Al-Zawahiri's recent call to take an active part in the Syrian revolution as a gateway for jihad against Israel).