



October 23, 2012

Implications of the death of Hisham Saidani, a top global jihad operative in the Gaza Strip, who died in a targeted killing carried out by the IDF



Hisham Ali Abd al-Karim Saidani (Hamas forum, October 13, 2012)

Overview

1. On the night of October 12-13, as part of the IDF's counter-terrorism activities, an Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked two motorcyclists in the Jebaliya refugee camp, northern Gaza Strip. **The two motorcyclists killed were operatives affiliated with global jihad networks in the Gaza Strip.**
2. One of the operatives killed was **Hisham Ali Abd al-Karim Saidani**, codenamed **Abu al-Walid al-Maqdisi**, a top operative of the **Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad** network and co-founder of a new umbrella organization named the **Shura Council of Jihad Fighters in Greater Jerusalem** (IDF Spokesman, October 13, 2012). According to Palestinian reports, the other person killed is also a top global jihad operative named **Ashraf Sabah** (Maan, Felesteen al-Yoom, Felesteen al-Aan, October 13, 2012).



The motorcycle which Hisham Saidani and another top operative rode in Jebaliya refugee camp (Wafa, October 13, 2012)

3. The Shura Council of Jihad Fighters in Greater Jerusalem is a relatively new umbrella organization in the Gaza Strip, whose participant networks are affiliated with the global jihad. The umbrella organization includes the **Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad** network and another jihadist network known as **Ansar al-Sunna**. This umbrella organization takes part in the global jihad effort to promote terrorist attacks against Israel via the Sinai Peninsula. It was behind the terrorist attack carried out along the **Israeli-Egyptian border** on June 18, 2012, in which an Israeli civilian was killed. It also claimed responsibility for firing long-range rockets on the Israeli city of Netivot on October 13, 2012.¹

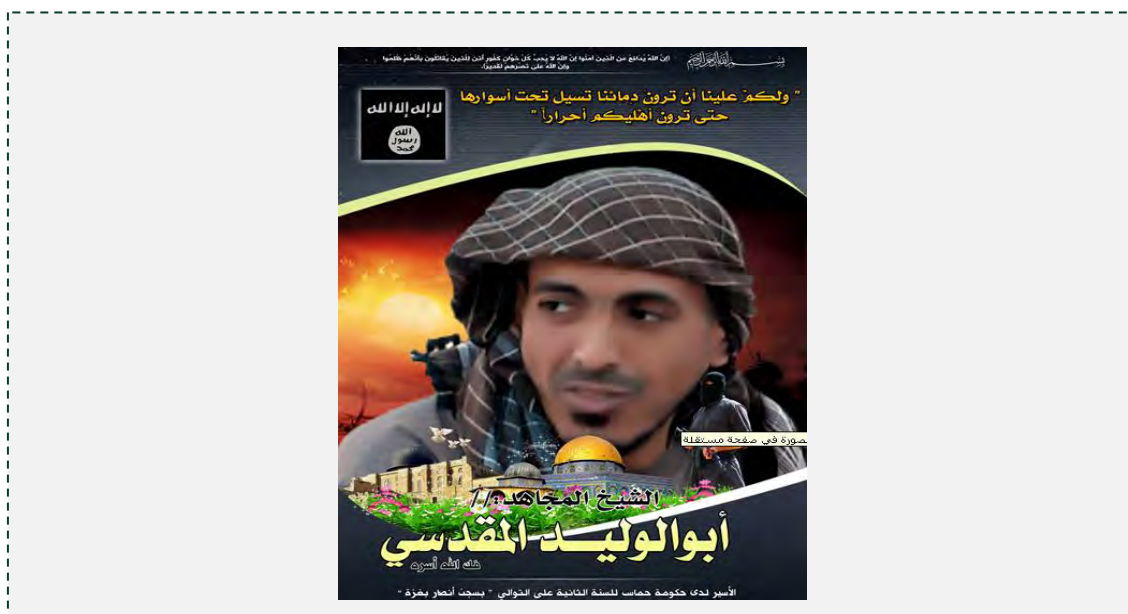
4. Several days prior to that, on October 7, 2012, the Israeli Air Force attacked a bicycle carrying two operatives who belonged to a network affiliated with the global jihad. One of those killed was **Abdullah Muhammad Mohsen Makkawi**, born in 1988, a member of the Shura Council of Jihad Fighters in Greater Jerusalem who was involved in activities against Israeli civilians, which included firing rockets, setting IEDs, and manufacturing arms and ammunition. He was also involved in a terrorist attack that took place on the Israeli-Egyptian border on June 18, where one Israeli civilian was killed, as well as in preparations for another terrorist attack (IDF Spokesman, October 8, 2012).

¹ See our August 13, 2012 Information Bulletin: "The Gazan-based Salafist jihadi network Tawhid wal-Jihad carried out the terrorist attack on the Israeli-Egyptian border on June 18, 2012, in which an Israeli civilian was killed. The attack emphasized the threat to Israel from the Sinai Peninsula and Egypt's difficulty in governing the region."

5. Hisham Saidani, born to a Gaza Strip family that relocated to Egypt, was a **prominent figure among global jihad organizations in the Gaza Strip**. He had academic degrees and operative terrorist experience gained in Iraq, and underwent ideological training in Jordan with Abu Muhammad Asem al-Maqdisi, one of Al-Qaeda's most important ideologues. It is our assessment that these relationships made it easier for him to **cooperate with global jihad operatives in Sinai for carrying out terrorist attacks from the Israeli-Egyptian border, taking advantage of the anarchy and chaos in the Sinai Peninsula**.

6. We believe that the deaths of Saidani and other top operatives in targeted killings have undermined—even if **only temporarily**—the **operative capabilities of Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad** (the most important global jihad organization in the Gaza Strip) and the **Shura Council**, the new umbrella organization. In Hamas' view, it has rid itself of a tough opponent who refused to obey its “rules of the game” on the policy of anti-Israeli terrorist attacks and the Hamas' internal conduct in the Gaza Strip.

A profile of Hisham Abd al-Karim Saidani



Hisham Saidani (Voice of Al-Tawhid forum, June 14, 2012)

7. **Hisham Ali Abd al-Karim Saidani** (a.k.a. **Abu al-Walid al-Maqdisi**) was born in Bureij (central Gaza Strip) in 1965. Some say he was born in Cairo. Saidani, who has an Egyptian citizenship, moved from the Gaza Strip to Egypt with his parents when he

was about two years old. While in Egypt, he used to visit a mosque near his home where he early on was introduced to Salafist ideology. He later studied in the faculty of Islamic law (Sharia) of Al-Azhar University, married, and moved to Jordan several years later. He had two degrees in Arabic literature and hadith, and was the author of several books on the subject.

8. While in Jordan Hisham Saidani became involved with **Abu Muhammad Asem al-Maqdisi, one of Al-Qaeda's main ideologues and the person considered the ideological mentor of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi** (a Jordanian-born Al-Qaeda operative who was that organization's representative in Iraq until he died in a targeted killing carried out by the United States).² It was apparently due to the considerable influence Al-Maqdisi had on Saidani that the latter chose the nickname "Al-Maqdisi".

9. After the September 11 terrorist attacks and the outbreak of the battles between the United States and its coalition against the jihadists in Afghanistan and Iraq, Al-Saidani decided to take an active part in the war. **In 2003 he moved to Iraq along with other Al-Qaeda members who had come with him from Jordan. He then returned to Jordan, from where he went to Egypt, and from Egypt to the Gaza Strip** (www.muslim.net, www.as-ansar.com, www.israj.net).

10. When Al-Saidani once again attempted to leave the Gaza Strip via the tunnels and go to Iraq, he was detained by Egyptian security forces, imprisoned, and subsequently released. In January 2008 Al-Saidani was able to come back to the Gaza Strip thanks to the porous state of the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. He lived in Al-Bureij refugee camp in the Gaza Strip and was a **co-founder of the Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad network, whose members were Gazan Salafist jihadi operatives.**

11. Saidani was detained by the Hamas administration security apparatuses on several occasions and even served prison time for his actions. He was first arrested on March 2, 2011. Prior to that, he was on the Hamas wanted list for two years for taking

² **Abu Muhammad Asem al-Maqdisi**, a highly influential jihadist ideologue, also considered Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's ideological mentor. A Palestinian born in Nablus in 1959, his family moved to Kuwait when he was three or four. Studied at the University of Mosul, Iraq, where he formed his Islamist worldview. **Traveled to Pakistan and Afghanistan**, where he became involved with jihadist groups. Came back to Jordan in 1992 and engaged in subversive activities against the Jordanian regime. Arrested and served a prison sentence in 1995-1996 together with Al-Zarqawi. After his release Al-Maqdisi was arrested once again on charges of planning terrorist attacks against American targets in Jordan. Released in 2005, arrested in 2010 and released in November 2011. He runs a **website** which, according to experts, is Al-Qaeda's main online library.

part in violent confrontations between Hamas forces and Salafist jihadi operatives in Rafah in August 2009.³

12. An attempt by Saidani's supporters to force Hamas into releasing him **led to the kidnapping and execution of Italian journalist Vittorio Arrigoni** in the Gaza Strip on April 15, 2011. The Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad network released a video announcing that it had kidnapped the journalist in response to the arrest of its leader Hisham Saidani by Hamas security forces. Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad later denied that the execution had been carried out by its operatives, apparently due to concerns of Hamas' reaction and public criticism in the Gaza Strip.

13. Saidani was released by Hamas in **August 2012**, only days before a terrorist attack on an Egyptian military outpost in Kerem Shalom (Maan, Felesteen al-Yoom, Felesteen al-Aan, October 13, 2012). His release was made possible thanks to mediation efforts involving elements in Jordan. Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad applauded the release, but demanded that Hamas immediately release all the detained and kidnapped members of the network. Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad also thanked tribal elders in Jordan and other individuals who had worked to secure Al-Saidani's release.



Photograph of Hisham Saidani posted in an Islamic forum calling for his release (aljahad.com)

14. As part of his terrorist activity, Hisham Saidani was responsible for carrying out terrorist attacks on the Gaza Strip border, which included setting IEDs along the border

³ The clashes began when Sheikh Abd al-Latif Moussa, who was seen as a top theological authority by Salafi jihadist networks, delivered a sermon at the Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taimiyyah Mosque in Rafah in which he strongly condemned the Hamas administration and its conduct, and even declared the establishment of an Islamic emirate in Palestine.

fence and firing rockets and mortar shells on south Israeli population centers. After his release he worked on a complex terrorist attack against Israel from the Sinai Peninsula **in cooperation with Gaza Strip operatives and jihad operatives in the Sinai Peninsula** (IDF Spokesman, October 13, 2012).

Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad

15. Since early 2008 a Salafist jihadi network called Oneness of God and Jihad in Greater Jerusalem (Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad fi Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis, Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad in short) has been active in the Gaza Strip. The name is taken from the initial name of the Al-Qaeda network in Iraq, headed (until his death in June 2006) by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

16. Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad was involved in a number of terrorist attacks. The first for which the network claimed responsibility took place on January 17, 2009, when an IED was used to attack an IDF jeep near Kissufim Crossing in the central Gaza Strip. One IDF soldier was killed and an officer was critically wounded; two soldiers sustained slight injuries. The attack was carried out to undermine the ceasefire agreed upon by Hamas and Israel on January 21, 2009, ending Operation Cast Lead.

17. The attack on the Israeli-Egyptian border on June 18, 2012 was the most conspicuous terrorist attack perpetrated by Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad in recent years. The network also claimed responsibility for firing dozens of rockets and mortar shells at Israel (www.israj.net), including long-range rockets fired in recent weeks on the city of Netivot (Al-Quds, October 14, 2012).

18. As mentioned earlier, the network was also responsible for the kidnapping and murder of Italian journalist and ISM member Vittorio Arrigoni, who worked in the Gaza Strip. On April 15, 2011, Tawhid wal-Jihad posted a video to announce that it had kidnapped Vittorio Arrigoni in response to Hamas' detention of Tawhid wal-Jihad leader Hisham Saidani. Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad denied having carried out the murder, apparently fearing a Hamas reprisal and public condemnation in the Gaza Strip.



A video depicting the last moments of Vittorio Arrigoni's life (YouTube).

[Right:] A video posted by Tawhid wal-Jihad about the abduction of Vittorio Arrigoni and the demand for the release of Hisham Saidani (YouTube).

19. On June 3, 2011, the Egyptian newspaper **Al-Masri Al-Yawm** interviewed one of the Salafist jihadi leaders who had co-founded the Army of Islam. Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad network was described as “the most extreme and violent of all the organizations.” One of the reasons, according to the interviewee, was the nature of its leader, Hisham Saidani, who until recently was detained by Hamas (Almasryalyoum.com website).



Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad announces, “We are all prepared to sacrifice ourselves for Abu al-Walid [i.e., Hisham Saidani]” (www.israj.net)