



April 18, 2013

**The Mujahideen Shura Council, a global jihad-affiliated organization based in the Gaza Strip, has recently become prominent for firing rockets and mortar shells into Israeli territory. Its terrorist activity challenges Hamas, which wants to preserve the lull in the fighting achieved after Operation Pillar of Defense.**



Firing rockets at Eilat, Israel's southernmost city (From a video uploaded to YouTube, April 17, 2013, [http://www.wattan.tv/new\\_index\\_hp\\_details.cfm?id=a5261565a6068488&c\\_id=1](http://www.wattan.tv/new_index_hp_details.cfm?id=a5261565a6068488&c_id=1))

## Overview

1. The Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem, a jihadist organization operating in the Gaza Strip, **claimed responsibility for two Grad rocket attacks on Eilat**, Israel's southernmost city, on April 17, 2013. The Mujahideen Shura Council was also behind the rocket and mortar shell attacks in recent weeks targeting Israel from the Gaza Strip. It claimed responsibility for several such attacks. Senior Salafist operatives in the Gaza Strip made it clear that they were not bound by the lull agreement achieved after Operation Pillar of Defense.

2.  **Hamas, which wants to preserve the lull**, is not completely successful in enforcing its policies on the so-called rogue networks, especially those affiliated the global jihad. The rocket fire attacking Eilat from the Sinai Peninsula and the continuing terrorist attacks from the Gaza Strip, accompanied by defiant public statements, **present security and ideological challenges for Hamas**. In our assessment, the challenges are heightened by the accusations recently leveled at Hamas in the Egyptian media, according to which Hamas operatives collaborated with terrorist organizations seeking to harm Egypt and undermine its national security.

3. In our assessment, the rockets targeting Eilat were fired with the support of jihadist networks operating in the Sinai Peninsula, allies of the Mujahideen Shura Council which share a common jihadist ideology. It again shows that **the Sinai Peninsula has been turned into a convenient venue for terrorist organizations affiliated the global jihad**, both those originating in the Gaza Strip and those indigenous to the Sinai Peninsula. They exploit the anarchy and lack of governance by the Egyptian regime (which is troubled by more pressing internal problems), and the existence of logistic support enabling them to receive weapons from Sudan, Libya and the Gaza Strip. The jihadist networks are based on the local Bedouin population (especially in the northern Sinai Peninsula), whose motives are both financial-commercial and political-ideological (hostility towards the Egyptian authorities and the spread of radical Islam).

## Rocket Fire Targeting Eilat

4. On the morning of **April 17, 2013**, two rockets were fired at Eilat, Israel's southernmost city. The Iron Dome aerial defense system, installed in the city a month previously, identified the launchings. One rocket hit was located at a construction site in the city of Eilat and the other in an open area on the Israeli-Jordanian border. The rockets, which had been fired from the Sinai Peninsula, did not cause either casualties or damage.

5. A terrorist organization in the Gaza Strip affiliated the global jihad called the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem claimed responsibility for the rocket fire. It said in a statement that the rockets had been fired to protest the deaths of

Palestinian terrorist prisoner Maysara Abu Hamdia<sup>1</sup> and of two Palestinian youths from Tulkarm who died during a violent confrontation with the Israeli security forces.<sup>2</sup> According to the announcement, two Grad missiles were fired, but the location from which they were fired (i.e., the Sinai Peninsula) was not mentioned. It also stated that the Mujahideen Shura Council demanded that the "sane members of Hamas" exert pressure on the de-facto Hamas administration to stop pursuing and detaining the Salafist operatives in the Gaza Strip (Ansar al-Mujahideen forum, April 17, 2013).



The announcement issued by the Mujahideen Shura Council claiming responsibility for the two rocket attacks on April 17, carried out in support of the so-called "oppressed prisoners" (YouTube, April 17, 2013).

## Mujahideen Shura Council Attacks since the End of Operation Pillar of Defense

6. In our assessment, the Mujahideen Shura Council has been behind most of the rocket and mortar shell attacks from the Gaza Strip since the end of Operation Pillar of Defense (November 21, 2012).

- 1) On **April 2, 2013**, a number of mortar shells were fired at the western Negev from the Gaza Strip. One of them landed in an open area between two villages.

<sup>1</sup> Palestinian terrorist operative **Maysara Abu Hamdia**, 64, died in an Israeli hospital on April 2, 2013, from complications of throat cancer. He was a terrorist operative who worked for Hamas and recruited the terrorist who was supposed to carry out a suicide bombing attack he had planned for a coffee house in Jerusalem in 2002. Maysara Abu Hamdia was convicted of attempted murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. His death led to riots in various Israeli jails where terrorist operatives are imprisoned. Riots also broke out between demonstrators and the Israeli security forces in several locations in Judea and Samaria.

<sup>2</sup> On **April 4, 2013**, four Palestinian youths went to an IDF post near Tulkarm. As they approached the post they threw Molotov cocktails at the soldiers stationed there. An IDF force chased them, and then opened fire. Two of the Palestinians were killed and another was wounded (IDF spokesman, April 7, 2013). A senior Israeli source said that according to the results of the initial investigation, the attack was carried out by a number of Palestinians who went to the IDF post armed with Molotov cocktails. While chasing them the IDF soldiers found themselves in danger and opened fire at the terrorists (IDF spokesman, April 7, 2013).

Several remains of mortar shells were found in an open area. The Mujahideen Shura Council said in an announcement that the mortars had been fired in response to the death of the Palestinian prisoner Maysara Abu Hamdia. The announcement also called on Hamas operatives to exert pressure on the Hamas security forces to make them stop acting against the organization's operatives. (**Note:** The announcement was similar in style to those issued after the rocket fire targeting Eilat).

2) On the morning of **March 21, 2013** (the second day of American President Barack Obama's visit to the region), five rockets were fired into Israeli territory from Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip. Two hit Israeli territory. One landed in the yard of a house in the southern city of Sderot and damaged the house. The other fell in an open area. Remains of a third rocket were found two weeks later, on April 2, 2013, in a kindergarten in Sderot. The rocket had penetrated the kindergarten's ceiling and partially exploded. It was only discovered later because the kindergarten had been closed for the Passover vacation.

## Hamas' Reaction

7. Since the end of Operation Pillar of Defense, **Hamas has made an effort to enforce its policy of restraint on the networks affiliated the global jihad and other rogue organizations operating in the Gaza Strip.** To that end Hamas' security services have detained global jihad operatives.

8. However, the heads of the Salafist networks in the Gaza Strip claim that **they are not bound by the lull agreement.** For example, **Abu Abdallah al-Maqdasi**, head of one of the networks, claimed that the Salafists had the "right to respond" to Israel and were not bound by any such agreement (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, April 9, 2013). **Abu al-Ainaa' al-Ansari**, a senior Salafist operative in the Gaza Strip, accused Egypt and Hamas of coordinating a war on the Salafists. He claimed that Egypt had given the orders for most of the detentions in the Gaza Strip and that some of the Salafist operatives had been interrogated by Egyptian security officers. He also claimed that the **"jihad will not stop despite the pressure and the threats and the attacks [on the Salafists]."** He claimed they could continue their activities and **disregard both Hamas and Egypt**, because **they were not bound by the lull agreement** (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, London, April 18, 2013),

9. The statements made by Salafists in the Gaza Strip and the Mujahideen Shura Council attacks from the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula **challenge Hamas, which**

**wants to preserve the lull.** They also increase the tension between Hamas and Egypt, following the accusations in the Egyptian media that Hamas has harmed Egyptian national security and that its operatives participated in the August 5, 2012 attack in the Sinai Peninsula in which 16 Egyptian policemen were killed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On the night of **August 5, 2012**, a group of at least 35 terrorist operatives took control of an Egyptian post in the Rafah district along the Egyptian-Gazan border, including two APCs. They drove the APCs to the Kerem Shalom crossing on the Israeli-Gazan border with the intention of killing Israeli civilians or security force personnel. In response the IDF attacked the APCs. At around 20:15 hours one of the vehicles exploded after being fired on by IDF forces. The other vehicle, which succeeded in entering Israeli territory, was attacked by ground forces with air support and destroyed. Two terrorist operatives who escaped from the vehicle attempted to enter Israeli territory and were shot. Four bodies were found on the Israeli side of the border along with a large quantity of weapons and other military equipment. Three bodies were found on the Egyptian side. In addition to the explosives found in the APC which entered Israeli territory, several terrorist operatives were also wearing explosive belts. **At least 16 Egyptian soldiers were killed in the attack** on the Egyptian post and seven were wounded. No organization claimed responsibility for the attack but it can be assumed that the terrorists belonged to a jihadist network.

## Appendix

### The Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem

#### Overview

1. The organization calling itself the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem<sup>4</sup> is one of the groups affiliated the global jihad operating in the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula. The source of the name is Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and in the past was used to refer to an umbrella organization of Islamic groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and operating in Iraq (which in recent years has changed its name to "the Islamic state of Iraq").

2. On **June 18, 2012**, Mujahideen Shura Council operatives carried out their first attack, which also served to declare their founding. A three-man squad infiltrated Israeli territory near the village of Beer Milca, near the Israeli-Egyptian border, in an area where the security fence had not yet been built. Using rifles and RPGs, they opened fire on two vehicles belonging to the contractors building the fence, killing an Israeli civilian employed by one of the contractors. Two of the terrorist operatives were killed during the attack.

3. When the attack began an IDF force carrying out routine security activities in the area arrived on the scene. The soldiers identified the squad as terrorist operatives in Israeli territory and opened fire, detonating a large IED carried by one of the terrorists. A search of the site revealed Kalashnikov assault rifles (IDF spokesman, June 18, 2012).

#### Declaration of the Founding of the Mujahideen Shura Council

4. The founding of the Mujahideen Shura Council was announced by a video posted on Islamic forums identified with Al-Qaeda after the attack. **The video made use of terminology and devices associated with Al-Qaeda.** A masked operative said that after Egypt's "Pharaoh" [i.e., Mubarak] had been overthrown, and after the "Alawite tyranny" [i.e., the regime of Bashar Assad] had been destabilized, and it was obvious that Sunni Muslims in Lebanon and Jordan were dissatisfied, "a wind of suffering is blowing toward the Jews from the Sinai Peninsula and the foothills of Mt. Sinai." He called on the Islamic nation and the Palestinians "to close ranks and plan the next

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<sup>4</sup> The term "**environs of Jerusalem**" also refers to all of Palestine and comes from one of the hadiths, the oral tradition of the prophet Muhammad.

stage" to "restore the rule of Allah." He also said that in view of the changes in the Arab world, the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem had been established as a base for jihad operations to restore the Islamic Caliphate. The video ended with a threat towards Israel: "...The cup [Israel] made the Muslims drink from will be used to make [Israel] drink poison...we will only return [our swords] to their sheaths after they are covered with your blood, after we put an end to all of you..."



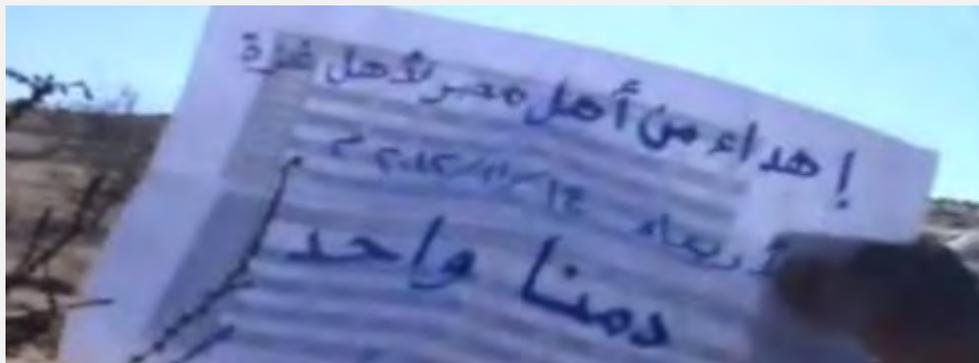
The Mujahideen Shura Council video announcing the establishment of the organization after the terrorist attack along the Israeli-Egyptian border (YouTube).

## Terrorist Attacks during Operation Pillar of Defense

5. On **November 16, 2012**, two days after Operation Pillar of Defense began, the Palestinian media, based on the Egyptian forces, reported that three rockets had been fired from the Sinai Peninsula at the Kerem Shalom region. The rockets were fired from a desert area a number of kilometers south of the Kerem Shalom crossing (Ma'an News Agency, November 17, 2012). The same day the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem claimed responsibility for firing four Grad rockets from the Sinai Peninsula at Israel's western Negev on November 14. The organization uploaded a video to YouTube claiming that the rocket fire "was in response to an attack on the civilians of the Gaza Strip." However, in reality the rockets were fired shortly before the beginning of Operation Pillar of Defense and not during it.



Video uploaded to YouTube documents the rocket fire (YouTube, November 14, 2012)



A few moments before the rockets were fired the following announcement was held up to the camera: "With respect from the residents of Egypt to the residents of the Gaza Strip. Wednesday, November 14, 2012. We are one" (YouTube, November 14, 2012)