



July 16, 2014

Expressions of support in the Gaza Strip for the Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS), which is affiliated with the global jihad. During Operation Protective Edge, Salafist-jihadi operatives, who identify with ISIS, fired a number of rockets at Israel.



Armed and masked Salafist-jihadi operatives in the Gaza Strip express their loyalty to ISIS in a video uploaded to websites (Al-Quds, February 12, 2014)

Overview

1. In recent months, **expressions of support for the Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham (hereinafter: ISIS) by Salafist-jihadi operatives in the Gaza Strip have been evident.** They are increasing as ISIS amasses victories and achievements in Syria and Iraq. These operatives held a rally in support of ISIS in Rafah and distributed a short support video clip on YouTube. In addition, there are nearly forty operatives in Syria, some of whom probably operate within a separate unit within ISIS named after **Sheikh Abu al-Nur al-Maqdisi** (a Salafist-jihadi sheikh in the Gaza Strip who was killed in 2009 by Hamas following his announcement of the establishment of an Islamic emirate in Palestine).
2. During **Operation Protective Edge**, a number of rockets were fired at Israel by Salafist-jihadi operatives in the Gaza Strip, **who identified publicly with ISIS** and

posted a short video clip showing the Al-Qaeda flag (for documentation of the shooting see below). At least two Salafist-jihadi operatives were killed in IDF attacks. Nevertheless, taking a broad perspective, the weight of Salafist-jihadi military operations carried out during Operation Protective Edge is marginal.

3. In our assessment, **Hamas perceives Salafist-jihadi activity as a potential risk and as a practical and ideological challenge to its rule in the Gaza Strip**. However, at this stage, the Salafist-jihadi infrastructure as a whole does not yet pose a real threat to the rule of Hamas, which possesses the capabilities to suppress any operational or ideological challenge that deviates from the policy dictated by Hamas (as in the past). Recent expressions of support for ISIS in the Gaza Strip were dealt with strongly by Hamas, even though it avoids overall confrontation with Salafist-jihadis.

Expressions of support for ISIS in the Gaza Strip

4. Following the successes of ISIS in northern Iraq in the first half of June 2014, Salafist-jihadi operatives **held a support rally** for ISIS in Palestinian Rafah. During the support rally, held on June 12, 2014, ISIS and Al-Qaeda flags were waved, and slogans were heard in favor of establishing an Islamic caliphate (the Islamic State) and against the Jews. The support rally was dispersed by the Hamas police.



Support rally for ISIS by residents of Palestinian Rafah, which was dispersed by the Hamas police (youtube.com).

5. Four months earlier (February 12, 2014), Salafist-jihadi elements in the Gaza Strip distributed a video clip to websites **expressing their loyalty to ISIS, headed by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**. The video clip shows 10 armed and masked men, **with the ISIS**

flag in the background (alquds.com, February 12, 2014). The expression of loyalty followed a rift between ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria (for a photo from the video clip, which has since been removed from the Internet, see the cover page).

Hamas's reactions

6. Hamas police quickly dispersed the demonstration of support for ISIS held in Rafah on June 12, 2014 (Amad website, June 14 2014). In addition, Hamas launched an **online media attack** against ISIS. The Hamas forum opened a special online thread, which included strong condemnations against ISIS, for example: **"ISIS operatives are not members of the Jihad, but rather agents who kill more Muslims than infidels."** Another comment: **"There is no room for takfiri thought in the Gaza Strip... they are Khawarij¹. The cure for them is the sword of Ali."** Someone else claimed that **"ISIS is killing Shi'ites in Iraq. ISIS is killing Shi'ites and Sunnis in Syria"** (Hamas online forum, June 14, 2014).

7. In response to the publication of the video clip supporting ISIS (February 12, 2014), **Salah al-Bardawil**, a senior Hamas operative in the Gaza Strip, claimed that there are no extremists affiliated with ISIS and Al-Qaeda in the Gaza Strip. He claimed that the online publications were designed to discredit Hamas and label it as a terrorist organization along with Al-Qaeda (Al-Quds, February 12, 2014).

Rocket fire by Salafist-jihadi operatives in the Gaza Strip affiliated with ISIS during Operation Protective Edge

8. **On July 8, 2014**, Salafist-jihadi operatives in the Gaza Strip uploaded a video clip to YouTube documenting several instances of rockets being launched at Israel. The video clip shows at least 10 rockets being launched at Israel in the evening and at night, probably from two or three different sites.

9. The video clip uploaded to YouTube is entitled: **"The Salafist-jihadi [movement] in the Gaza Strip - lovers of the Islamic state [i.e., ISIS] launches rockets at the**

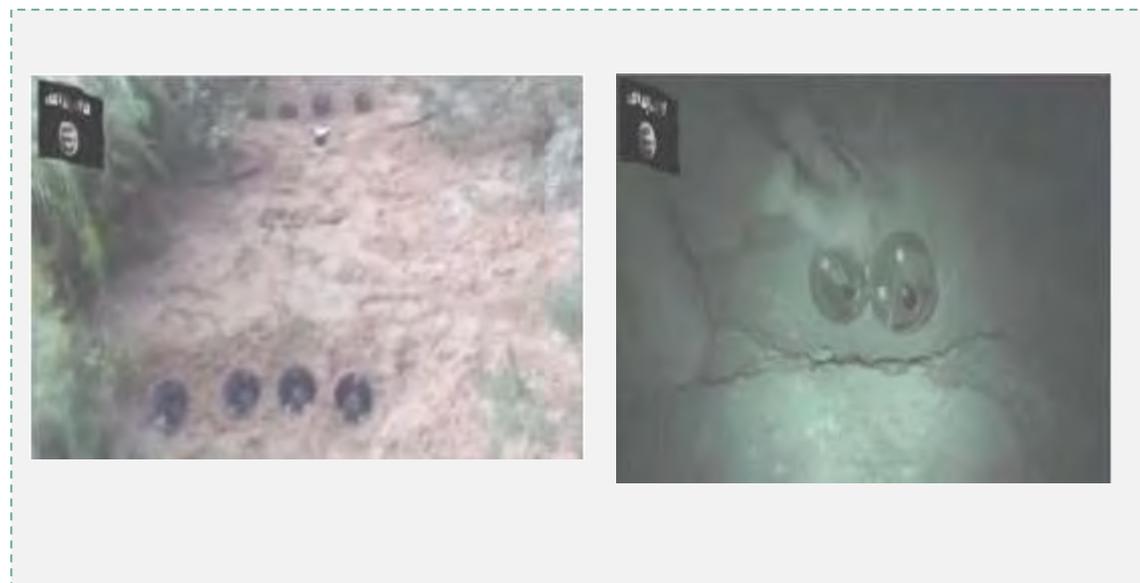
¹ **Takfiris** - those declaring a Muslim person or group of Muslims as infidels, a declaration that means that the blood of individuals and population groups may be spilled. "Takfiris" has become a derogatory name for Al-Qaeda and the global jihad used by their opponents (Iran, Hezbollah). **Khawarij** - the first sect in Islam that broke away from the army of Ali bin Abi Talib in the battle of Siffin (in 657 AD) in protest against his agreement to turn to arbitration. "Khawarij" has become a derogatory name for groups that have been expressly excluded from the general framework of Islam.

Jews.” The video clip shows **Al-Qaeda flags**. Its opening scene reads: “Jihad and shooting - sons of the Islamic State, Bayt al-Maqdis [i.e., Jerusalem].”

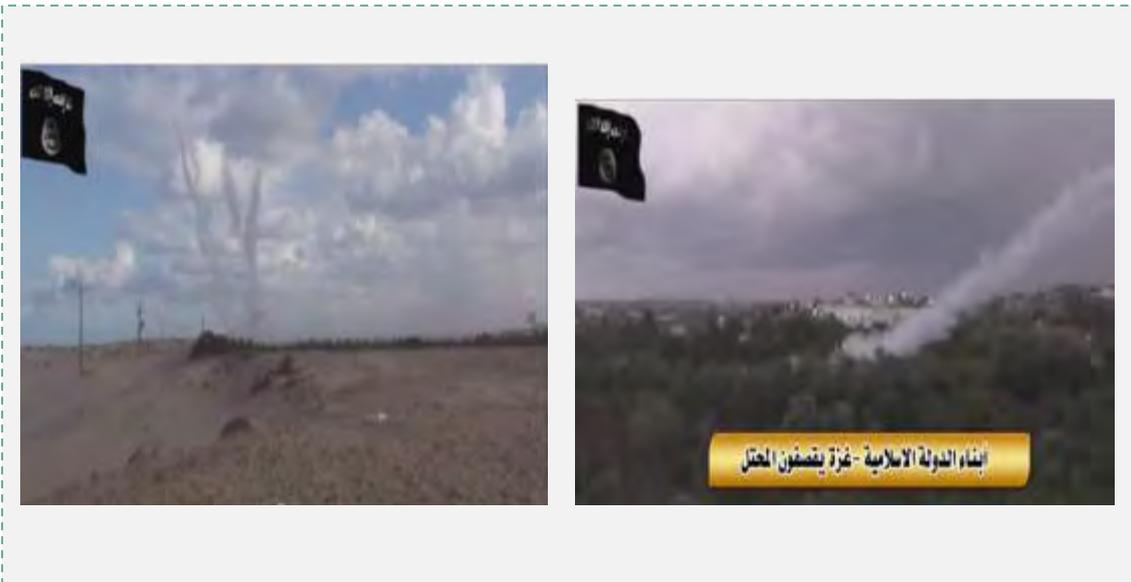
10. Following are a few pictures from the video clip.



Left: The opening scene of the video clip: “Jihad and shooting - sons of the Islamic State, Bayt al-Maqdis” (youtube.com). Shooting in the middle of the night; Right: the text at the bottom reads “Sons of the Islamic State - Gaza bombing the [Zionist] occupier.” The Al-Qaeda flag appears in the top left (youtube.com).



Left: Eight rockets ready for launching in broad daylight (apparently in the late evening), with the Al-Qaeda flag on the left. Right: Two rockets ready for launching late at night, with the Al-Qaeda flag on the left.



Left: Simultaneous firing of a number of rockets, with the Al-Qaeda flag on the left. Right: Rocket fire in the late evening, with the Al-Qaeda flag on the left

Appendix

Mobilization of Salafist-jihadis into Al-Qaeda and the global jihad in Syria – update (early July 2014)

Salafist-jihadi operatives from the Gaza Strip joining the ranks of ISIS

11. The number of Salafist-jihadi operatives from the Gaza Strip who joined organizations in Syria affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad **is estimated by us at close to 40²**. Moreover, we believe that **ISIS**, due to its accomplishments, **has become more attractive to operatives from the Gaza Strip** as well as to other foreign fighters from the Arab/Muslim world and Western countries. Therefore, in our assessment, most of the operatives from the Gaza Strip joined the ranks of ISIS, or defected to it from other organizations, and a small number of them joined the Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria.

12. At the end of May and in July 2014, Palestinian and Syrian media websites published details about three operatives from the Gaza Strip who died in Syria in the ranks of organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad:

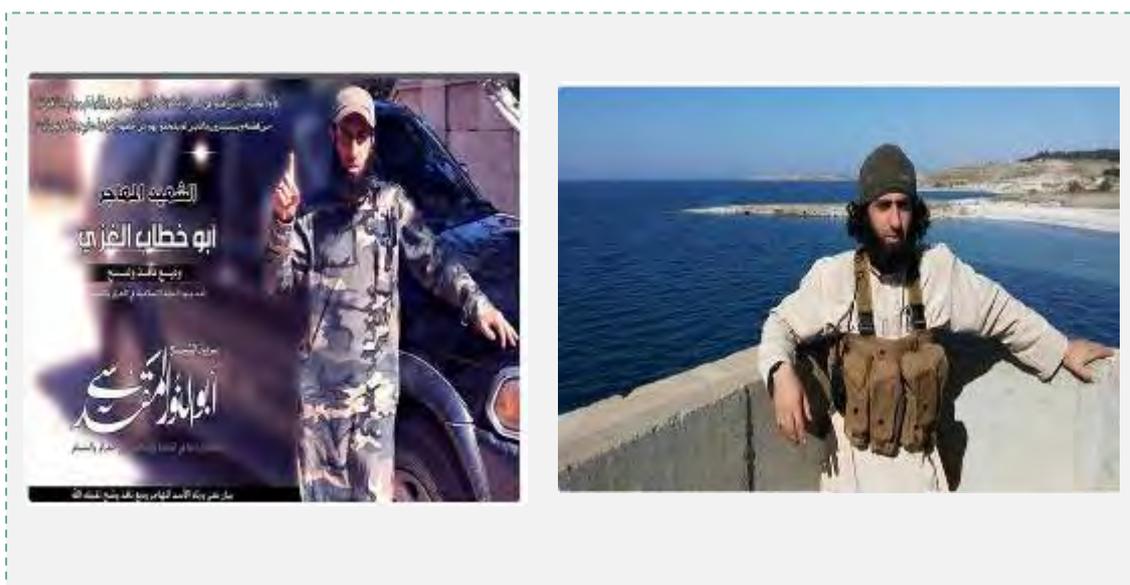
A. **Wadi' Nafez Washah** (aka **Abu Khattab the Gazan**) - resident of the Jebaliya refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip. He died on May 25, 2014, in the battles around Deir ez-Zor in eastern Syria, fighting in the ranks of **ISIS**. A jihadist network (which operates in Syria in the ranks of ISIS?) calling itself the **Company of Sheikh Abu Nur al-Maqdisi** (see below) issued the announcement of his death (Gaza Alan Facebook page, May 25, 2014; alplatformmedia.com, May 25, 2014). His father said that his son Wadi' started out in the ranks of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), then joined the Jerusalem

² In January 2014, the number of those who joined the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front and ISIS was estimated by the ITIC at about 30. Since then, however, in our assessment, more operatives have joined the ranks of these organizations and, in our assessment, they now number 40. For details about those who joined and those who were killed in Syria (up to January 14, 2014), see the ITIC Information Bulletin of January 22, 2014: "Israeli Arabs and Palestinians Join the Ranks of the Rebels in Syria."

Brigades, the military wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and eventually joined the Salafist-jihadis in the Gaza Strip. **In August 2013, he managed to escape to Egypt through the tunnels**, from there he continued to Syria (through Turkey?) and reached Aleppo, where he **joined the ranks of ISIS**. Previously he was captured by the Egyptian army in Sinai. He was returned to the Gaza Strip, where he was arrested by the Hamas security services, which interrogated him under torture for a month (jbcnews.net, Jordan, May 26, 2014).



Left: death notice in the Gaza Strip mourning the death of Wadi' Nafez Washah in the battles in Dir ez-Zor (alplatformmedia.com, May 25, 2014). Right: Wadi' Nafez Washah during his stay in Syria (Gaza Alan Facebook page, May 25, 2014).



Wadi' Nafez Washah aka Abu Khattab the Gazan (Twitter account of the jihad fighters from the Gaza Strip in ISIS, May 24, 2014)

B. **Arafat Anwar al-Sa'idi** (aka **Afu** or **Abu Khattab**) - Palestinian and Syrian media websites quoted a notice **published by the Al-Nusra Front** (Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria) on May 12, 2014, on the death of Arafat Anwar al-Sa'idi. His place of death is unknown. He was a resident of the Al-Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. According to the notice, Arafat al-Sa'idi left the Gaza Strip some two years ago and joined the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front (Samanews.com and Maannews.net, May 12 and 13, 2014). Other websites reported that **ISIS, in which Al-Sa'idi was a member**, announced that he was killed on May 9, 2014 in Syria (Al-Jamahir Forum, May 18, 2014). According to video clips that appeared on YouTube after his death, Arafat al-Sa'idi was an operative of the military wing of the Popular Resistance Committees in the Gaza Strip (YouTube, May 17, 2014).



Left: Photo of Arafat al-Sa'idi as it appeared on a forum closely affiliated with ISIS in Syria (Syrian Maash website, May 17, 2014). Right: Arafat al-Sa'idi (Maannews.net, May 13, 2014).



YouTube video clip featuring photos of Arafat al-Sa'idi during his activity in the military wing of the Popular Resistance Committees in the Gaza Strip (YouTube, May 17, 2014)

C. **Abd al-Rahman Mahdi al-Nuri** (aka **Abu Talha al-Maqdisi**) - resident of the Nuseirat refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. Killed in Syria on July 10, 2014.



Left: Photo of Abd al-Rahman Mahdi al-Nuri (paldf.net). Right: Photo of Abd al-Rahman Mahdi al-Nuri, aka Abu Talha al-Maqdisi, killed in Syria (paldf.net)



Abd al-Rahman Mahdi al-Nuri photographed with another casualty in Syria (probably an Egyptian). The Al-Qaeda flag appears on the top right. Bottom right caption: “They emigrated together and were killed on the soil of the beloved Bilad al-Sham (Greater Syria).” Bottom right caption: “Jihad fighters from the Gaza Strip in Al-Sham (Syria) (paldf.net).”

Operatives from the Gaza Strip at ISIS training camps in Syria

13. In March and April 2014, photos of **operatives from the Gaza Strip training at ISIS training camps in Syria** were posted on Twitter and YouTube. Photos of ISIS operatives from the Gaza Strip firing rockets at Syrian Army posts were also distributed.

14. The video clips stated that the trainee operatives are members of the **Sheikh Abu Nur al-Maqdisi Company**. Therefore, ISIS might be operating a **unit of operatives from the Gaza Strip**, just as the organization operates units of other nationalities. The sheikh for whom the unit is named is **Sheikh Abd al-Latif Khalid Muhammad Moussa** (aka **Abu al-Nur al-Maqdisi**), a Salafist-jihadi sheikh **killed by Hamas (2009)**. Until his death, he was the source of religious-ideological authority for Salafist-jihadi operatives in the Gaza Strip. On August 14, 2009, he delivered a sermon **at the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque in Rafah, in which he announced the establishment of an Islamic emirate in Palestine**. Hamas saw the speech as provocation, challenging its rule in the Gaza Strip. Its forces broke into the mosque and exchanged fire with armed jihadi operatives who had barricaded themselves there. Jihadi operatives were killed in

these battles, including Sheikh Abu al-Nur al-Maqdisi, who became a role model for the Salafist-jihadis in the Gaza Strip³.



Jihad operatives from the Gaza Strip, members of the Sheikh Abu al-Nur al-Maqdisi Company, training at ISIS training camps in Syria (Twitter account of the jihad fighters from the Gaza Strip in ISIS, April 17, 2014)

³ For a summary of the killing of Abu al-Nur al-Maqdisi, see the ITIC Information Bulletin of September 1, 2009: " Hamas steps up its struggle against the global jihad-affiliated networks trying to challenge its control of the Gaza Strip; recently it did not hesitate to use considerable force during the violent suppression of global Jihad operatives, one of whose leaders declared the establishment of an Islamic emirate at the Ibn Taymiyyah Mosque in Rafah."



Jihad operatives from the Gaza Strip, members of the Sheikh Abu al-Nur al-Maqdisi Company, fighting in the ranks of ISIS in Syria (Twitter account of the jihad fighters from the Gaza Strip in ISIS, March 24, 2014)



Video clip documenting jihadi operatives from the Gaza Strip fighting in the ranks of ISIS and firing 107 mm Katyusha rockets at positions of the Assad regime's army in Aleppo (YouTube video clip, May 20, 2014)