



Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

4 October 2009

The struggle between Hamas and the jihadi-Salafist networks in the Gaza Strip affiliated with the global jihad.

Overview

1. On August 14, 2009, Hamas used military force to suppress the global jihad-affiliated Jund Ansar Allah (The Army of Allah's Supporters) network. The confrontations in and around the Ibn Taymmiyah mosque in Rafah killed at least 24 Palestinians and wounded more than 130. Several hundred suspected Palestinians were detained, among them jihadi-Salafist operatives. The dead included Sheikh Abd al-Latif Musa (a source of religious-ideological authority for the jihadi-Salafist networks) and Khaled Banath, known as Abu Abdallah, "the Syrian" (the Jund Ansar Allah's military commander). During the confrontations the Hamas forces did not hesitate to shoot at the mosque, a prominent Islamic symbol named for Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taymmiyah, and to cause heavy damages.¹

2. About a month and a half after the bloodshed at the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque **Hamas and the jihadi-Salafists in the Gaza Strip tend toward the following:**

i) **Hamas has adopted a conciliatory attitude toward Jund Ansar Allah and the other networks** (although it has not abandoned its policy of imposing its control over the jihadist networks and other centers of power which try to challenge it). That was reflected in Ismail Haniya's September 15 speech, in which he expressed Hamas' readiness to cross off the recent events with the "brothers" in Rafah. His attitude was conciliatory, and he suggested releasing several dozen of them from detention for Eid al-Fitr, the holiday that ends the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. On September 17 the minister of justice in the Hamas de-facto administration announced that 50 security

¹ For further information see our September 1, 2009 bulletin "Hamas steps up its struggle against the global jihad-affiliated networks trying to challenge its control of the Gaza Strip" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hamas_e080.pdf.

detainees would be liberated (Hamas sources stated that they were Jund Ansar Allah network operatives).

ii) **The jihadi-Salafist networks have continued their activities, keeping a low profile to avoid exposure to measures Hamas might take against them.** A senior Jund Ansar Allah operative told Reuters that the network's operatives had gone underground and were keeping their activities covert to evade Hamas' security forces (by shaving their beards and abandoning their Afghani style of dress). He said that the strength of Jund Ansar Allah had not been weakened and the network continued to attract not only civilians but also senior Hamas operatives. He also said he opposed the ceasefire with Israel, stressing that Jund Ansar Allah would **continue its attacks against Israel** and not hesitate to confront Hamas if it tried to stop them. (Note: On the ground, jihadist operatives are **in fact involved** in the rogue attacks from the Gaza Strip meant to undermine the relative calm, to which Hamas is still committed.)

iii) **Hamas is the subject of savage attacks by the jihadi-Salafist networks and operatives** affiliated with **Al-Qaeda and the global jihad**. They strongly condemn the suppression of its operatives and some of them even called to avenge the men murdered in the events and to destroy the "Hamas state" (or in the words of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, "the gang controlling Gaza"). The events have apparently caused a **deep rift** between Al-Qaeda and the global jihad and Hamas which will not quickly heal, even in view of Hamas' recent conciliatory attitude toward Jund Ansar Allah and the jihadi-Salafist operatives in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas' (possibly temporary) conciliatory attitude toward the jihadi-Salafist networks

3. Since the events at the Ibn Taymmiyah mosque, Hamas' attitude toward Jund Ansar Allah and the other jihadi-Salafists has been conciliatory, if only for tactical reasons, while on the other hand, Hamas has not abandoned its policy of imposing its authority on all the focal points of power in the Gaza Strip. Hamas has done so because of the networks' popularity in the Gaza Strip, even among Hamas operatives, and because of the sharp criticism it has faced from radical Islamic groups, especially those affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad. At the same time Hamas is careful to represent itself as a movement based on Islam and faithful to jihad in order to answer the accusations made against it after the events at the Ibn Taymmiyah mosque.

4. That outlook was expressed in a speech given by Ismail Haniya, head of the de facto Hamas administration, during the Ramadan fast-breaking meal on September 15. He represented himself as the pupil of the **"great preachers and generous educators"** of

the Muslim Brotherhood, who had taught him. He boasted of his activities for Islam, Jerusalem and Palestine in accordance with the “**jihād ideology of the Hamas movement.**” He claimed that since Hamas had been running the Gaza Strip it had made sure not to do anything contrary to Muslim religious law and often consulted with the sages about problems related to religious law (Hamas’ Palestine-Info website, Al-Aqsa TV, September 15, 2009). He spoke of the “difference of opinion we had with our brothers in the city of Rafah,” claiming that it had been a case of “young brothers who were deeply attached to Islam but had been influenced by an incorrect understanding of it and of our law – They performed acts of heresy, shed blood and proclaimed an emirate.” However, he said, “what happened, happened,” and the government decided to release dozens of those detained after the events at the Ibn Taymmiyah mosque on August 14. He said that their release was a gesture to the sages for Eid al-Fitr and “as part of spreading [the spirit of] concession from within” (Hamas’ Palestine-Info website, September 15, 2009).

5. In the wake of the speech, on September 17 **Muhammad Faraj al-Ghoul**, minister of justice in the Hamas de-facto administration, held a press conference where he announced that “Prime Minister Ismail Haniya has generously decided to release 120 felons and 50 security detainees for Eid al-Fitr.” A source within the Hamas administration said that the 50 security detainees were members of the Jund Ansar Allah network, detained following the events in Rafah (Reuters, Agence France-Presse, Al-Quds, September 17; Al-Aqsa TV, September 18, 2009).



Detainees released by Hamas for Eid al-Fitr
(Hamas’ Palestine-Info website, September 19, 2009).

Contradictory reports about the fate of *jaljalat* operative Mahmoud Taleb

6. Another possible expression of Hamas’ policy of reconciliation was “arranging affairs” between Hamas and **Mahmoud Taleb**, who identified himself as one of the heads of the

*jaljalat*² and was interviewed by the Palestinian and Arab media, where his views were defiantly anti-Hamas.³ According to a Hamas forum, Mahmoud Taleb, *jaljalat* commander in the Al-Shati refugee camp, returned to the ranks of Hamas after he surrendered to the leadership of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades. As far as can be determined, he was pardoned and returned to his family and “all the differences of opinion were resolved” (Hamas’s PALDF forum, September 21, 2009). However, a Fatah forum reported that he was killed by “Hamas militias,” which issued the cover story that he had escaped from detention (Fatah forum Watan, September 28, 2009).

Senior Jund Ansar Allah commander: jihadi-Salafist activity continues despite the blow the network suffered at the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque

7. A senior Jund Ansar Allah operative calling himself **Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi** spoke by phone with Reuters, a conversation arranged by senior Salafist operatives in the Gaza Strip. The main issues discussed were the following (Reuters, September 16, 2009):

i) **The activities continue, but covertly:** The blow suffered by the Jund Ansar Allah network at the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque forced its operatives to go **underground**, but **it also increased their motivation**. He said they now preserved secrecy and many of them had shaved their beards and abandoned their Afghani style of dress to evade Hamas’ hunt for them. According to al-Maqdisi, Jund Ansar Allah had thousands of operatives and thousands of supporters [**Note:** The numbers are probably exaggerated.] The network, he claimed, also attracted **senior Hamas operatives**, who attended secret lectures given by Salafist sheikhs.

ii) **Detentions of Jund Ansar Allah operatives:** Al-Maqdisi claimed that close to 500 jihadist operatives had been detained since the events at the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque [According to Hamas, the number was 160, of whom 50 have already been released and 50 more who were supposed to be released for Eid al-Fitr.] He said the Hamas security forces had also detained their relatives as a means of exerting pressure on them. As to Hamas’ claim that it was “reeducating” the operatives who had been detained, al-Maqdisi’s reaction was that even if they detained all the Jund Ansar Allah operatives, Hamas would never be able to change the way they thought, not even of one operative.

iii) **Jund Ansar Allah will continue to act against Israel even if Hamas objects:** Hamas, he said, was now regarded as an enemy of Jund Ansar Allah because it prevent the network’s attacks on Israel. The network did not intend to confront Hamas

² For further information about the *jaljalat* see Note #1.

³ On July 11, 2009, **Mahmoud Muhammad Taleb** was interviewed by *Al-Ayyam* (translated by the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center and presented as the appendix to the bulletin referred to in Note #1. On September 6, 2009, he gave a similar interview to the Arab newspaper *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*.

but it opposed the movement's attempts to maintain a ceasefire with Israel and it would oppose anyone who tried to stop the jihadi activities of the "resistance" [i.e., terrorist attacks from the Gaza Strip]. (**Note:** In effect, **jihadist operatives** participate in the attempts made by the rogue networks to attack from the Gaza Strip (rocket and mortar shell fire, light arms fire) and in that way undermine the relative lull in the fighting between the Palestinians and Israel, to which Hamas is still committed.)

iv) **The Salafist groups in the Gaza Strip do not have formal contacts with Al-Qaeda, but they regard bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri as their ideological mentors.** They also said they were loyal to Abu Omar al-Bagdadi, who heads a network called the Islamic State in Iraq.⁴

8. Jihadist elements have promised to wreak vengeance on Hamas for the events at the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque. So far nothing significant has been done except for attempts to detonate bombs near Hamas security installations, which had no real results. On the night of August 29, 2009, two bombs exploded a few minutes apart in Gaza City. "Security sources" in the Gaza Strip reported that two other bombs, also placed near Hamas security installations, were defused. In the assessment (of security sources) in the Gaza Strip, the attacks were the work of the Jund Ansar Allah network in retaliation for the suppression of its operatives (Hamas's PALDF forum, BBC Radio in Arabic and other media sources). On September 16 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi denied to Reuters that jihadi-Salafist operatives had been involved in the bombings.

Al-Qaeda and the global jihad strongly attack Hamas

9. Jihadi-Salafist networks and operatives affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad, including Salafist Islamic clerics in Arab countries, strongly attacked Hamas for its violent suppression of the jihadists at the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque, and some of them even called for their deaths to be avenged and the "Hamas state" to be destroyed.

10. The following are some of their statements:

i) On September 5 **Al-Qaeda in Iraq** posted a strong denunciation of Hamas on its main information website (Al-Fajr Media Center). It reiterated its denunciation of "the gang controlling Gaza" for attacking the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque. It said that and executing Salafist Muslims was a service to the Crusaders [the West], the Jews and the

⁴ **Abu Omar al-Bagdadi** is the nickname of **Abu Abdallah al-Rashad al-Bagdadi**. He inherited Abu Hamzeh al-Muhajar and his predecessor, Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi, the two former leaders of Al-Qaeda in Iraq who were killed. In 2006 he set up a network called "The Muslim State of Iraq" which was a kind of umbrella organization for Islamic operatives in Iraq affiliated with Al-Qaeda. Although it does not actually exist, the Muslim State of Iraq is not entirely virtual. It has a structure – real or imagined – which has ministers who function like a governmental cabinet. There have recently been rumors that the Americans killed Abu Omar al-Bagdadi, or that he was captured by the Iraqi army, but so far they have not been verified.

infidel Arabs, especially the regime of [Egyptian President] Hosni Mubarak. The announcement called on Allah to avenge the blood of the murdered men and to destroy the Hamas state, and demanded that the Salafists in the Gaza Strip not negotiate with "the criminals."



Headline of the Al-Qaeda in Iraq condemnation of Hamas (Al-Fajr Media Center, September 5, 2009).

ii) The Egyptian Salafist sheikh, **Sayid Hussein al-Afani**, deplored the killing of Sheikh Abd al-Latif Musa at the hands of Hamas and the shelling of the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque. On August 17, 2009, interviewed by Al-Khaleejiah TV, he praised Sheikh Abd al-Latif Musa, saying that he had been a well-known figure in Salafist circles in Egypt and greatly honored. (Sheikh al-Afani wrote the introduction to Sheikh Abd al-Latif Musa's book about Muslim doctrine. He also wrote a biography of Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the founder of Hamas, and wrote a poem eulogizing Nizar Riyyan, a senior Hamas operative killed during Operation Cast Lead.⁵)

iii) On August 31, 2009, the **Salafist Forum in Yemen**, an organization of dozens of senior Islamic religious figures, issued a statement signed by many of them severely criticizing the way Hamas handled the crisis and the attacks on Sheik Abd al-Latif Musa and the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque. It called Hamas' behavior misguided and unjustified. It also said that Hamas' actions offended the sensibilities of their Salafist brothers, who were considered their strategic depth throughout the world.⁶

iv) **Assad Bayoud al-Tamimi**, an extremist Islamic activist of Palestinian extraction, was savagely critical of Hamas, saying that the acts of the organization were an unforgiveable crime and could not be justified. He accused Hamas of believing in

5 http://mdarik.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1248188005121&pagename=Islamyoun%2FIYALayout

6 http://mdarik.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1251021323143&pagename=Islamyoun%2FIYALayout

“democracy and national unity with the enemies of Allah” [i.e., the Palestinian Authority]. He wondered whether Hamas had “received money from the Persian Shi’ites to fight the Salafist operatives in Gaza and to destroy the mosque bearing the name of Sheik Ibn Taymiyyah, who represented the Salafit doctrine.”⁷

v) The Jordanian Salafist Sheikh **Issam al-Barqawi**, nicknamed Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, used his website to post an open letter accusing Hamas of murdering Muslims (Shabicat Filastin al-I’lamiya, August 29, 2009).

⁷ <http://www.almitro.com/09/3547.html>