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Abstract: This is a series of papers that translate and analyze articles, reports, religious decrees, and other documents, written in Arabic by Islamist scholars, clerics, operatives, or intellectuals.

From Riyadh 1995 to Sinai 2004: The Return of Al-Qaeda to the Arab Homeland

By Reuven Paz

(PRISM Series of Global Jihad, No. 3/2 – October 2004)

Introduction

The attack in the Sinai resorts of Taba and Nuweiba on October 7, 2004, put an end to exactly seven years of a de facto timeout in terrorist operations conducted on Egyptian soil. During these seven years the Egyptian authorities have managed to thwart several attempted terrorist operations. In the course, they have arrested several hundred Islamists, most of whom were returnees from other Islamist fronts outside of Egypt—Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Albania, and other countries. In November 2002, Syria extradited to Egypt the leader of the Egyptian Gama'ah Islamiyyah—Dr. Ahmad Rifa'i Taha, who was part of the global Islamist front of Al-Qaeda, since 1998. Egyptian groups—primarily the Jihad and Gama'at—either found other arenas for their fight, or reversed their policy and publicly declared a shift from the military into a political struggle. This shift led the Egyptian authorities to gradually release members of the Gama'at from prison, including senior activists who took part in the assassination of the late President Anwar al-Sadat in October 1981. Several Islamist independent groups of Egyptians, the largest of them a group



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named Al-Wa`d, were tried. The authorities also increased their pressure on the Muslim Brotherhood and their social infrastructure. Yet, it was also important to point out that so far, some ten days after the attacks in the Sinai Peninsula, the Egyptian authorities have not yet arrested significant Egyptian suspects, besides Bedouins in Sinai who provided logistic support to the terrorists. This means that if the attackers were Egyptians, they are not members of the groups and circles under surveillance in Egypt, or are unknown to the security authorities.

Consequently, the attacks in Sinai were a renewal of Islamist terrorist activity. As far as the targets of the attacks are concerned, these operations were also conducted in typical Egyptian manner – the combination of Israeli civilians and tourism. Nevertheless, the attacks may have been carried out by a new generation of Islamists.

The “Return Home” Syndrome

One of the most important doctrines of the Egyptian Jihad from its birth in the late 1970s, has been what Ayman Al-Zawahiri and before him Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj phrased as follows: “The way to liberate Jerusalem moves through the liberation of Cairo.” Zawahiri wrote it in several of his books, including “Knights under the Prophet’s Banner,” published in December 2001. Faraj referred to this notion in his famous book “The Neglected Duty,” [*Al-Faridhah al-Gaebah*] which has been circulated by the Egyptian Jihad since 1980.

The principle that the road to the liberation of Jerusalem goes through Cairo, has always been accepted by Egyptian Islamists before and after the globalization of the Jihad by other Islamists, primarily among them the Palestinians such as Abdallah Azzam and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdesi. It might have been due to the fact that Islamist Palestinians who emerged in exile, including in Jordan, Kuwait, or Europe, had a strong tendency to globalize their Islamist struggle, like their nationalist counterparts did from within the PLO. Islamist groups that remained on Palestinian soil—such as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas—tended to limit their struggle to Palestine. The two Palestinian uprisings in 1987-1993, and the ongoing Intifada that began in September 2000, only deepened the national and localized element of their Jihad.

The regional view of Islamists in the Arab world of the “infidel” governments as the first priority target has also been a vital element of the Saudi party of Al-Qaeda, led



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by Osama bin Laden. Many among the younger generation of Islamist scholars in Saudi Arabia supported this view. According to Al-Qaeda's strategy, the global Islamist struggle against the United States aims first and foremost at pushing the Americans out of the Arab and Muslim world, and not necessarily at destroying the United States.

The war in Iraq has deepened the American involvement in the Arab world, and thus, provided Al-Qaeda with a better opportunity to focus its efforts on this part of the world. The Americans "intruded their home" and should therefore, be fought by means of a violent Jihad. The American occupation of Iraq gave the Islamists a golden opportunity to focus on their original arena, and return home from exile in distant regions. Once again, this return to the homeland is accepted by both the Saudi and Egyptian elements of Global Jihad.

The Egyptian Tile in the Islamist Axis

The attacks in Sinai have generated many reactions on Islamist web sites. Most reactions were expressions of support for the operations, often including expectations of further attacks. The reactions included heavy criticism of the Palestinian Islamists—mainly Hamas—who publicly denied any involvement in the attacks and stressed that their operations are limited to attacks against Israel and against Israeli targets on Palestinian soil.

The only reaction that we might consider as an official one was published in the most recent issue of the on-line magazine "Sawt al-Jihad" (No. 27), published in October 18, 2004. Within the description of the attacks, taken from the media, they wrote:

"It was the proper target from the strategic point of view, since the attacks targeted the Jews, who are the first element of the original infidels, and a target for all the Jihadi groups. It took place during their religious holiday, what guaranteed a large number of them in the place of the attacks... Allah healed the heart of the believers from the massacres of Sabra and Shatila, Gaza, and Beit Lehem, and took revenge for our targeted Muslim brothers in Palestine. Let the tyrants be happy with their peace agreements, road maps, and ridiculous initiatives. They represent themselves only, and the Muslim nations are exempt from them."



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The emphasis was not on Egypt but on targeting Israeli tourists. But, in the editorial of the on-line magazine, written by the Saudi Saud al-`Utaybi, he blessed Egypt “where your brave brothers made their move by targeting a hotel crowded with Jews, killing dozens of them as a sacrifice for Allah, and on the eve of Ramadhan.”

Of the several analyses of the attacks, one is particularly worthy of mentioning, as it may sketch the future strategy of Al-Qaeda or Global Jihad, a strategy that contains the notion of the “return home.”

A short article written by Abu `Abbas al-`Aedhi—a name that suggests a Saudi origin—analyzed the attack on the background of the old/new strategy of Al-Qaeda. The article, titled “From Riyadh/East to Sinai,”¹ was published in several Islamist forums. Its fully translated text appears below. Al-`Aedhi’s analysis may not be accurate, and may not have been written with the approval of Al-Qaeda or another Islamist group. Still, the analysis was outstanding, and its style reminds us of the former generation of interpreters of Al-Qaeda whose analyses were posted on the Internet between 2001-2003, and the most prominent of whom was the Saudi Lewis Atiyyat Allah.

The main theme of the article is the centrality of Jihad in Arabia for the groups of global Jihad. Hence, the attack in Sinai is the most recent link in the chain of attacks that began in November 13, 1995, in East-Riyadh, in which seven foreigners, among them five Americans, were killed and about 60 were injured. A group calling itself “The Islamic Movement for Change” carried out the explosion by means of a car bomb detonated in complex housing foreign employees in the Eastern part of Riyadh. Four of the attackers were arrested and executed on May 31, 1996, shortly before another significant explosion in the buildings called “Khobar Towers” in the city of Dhahran, in June 1996. If the confessions of four interrogees, which were published by the Saudi media, were true, we could learn that the group was influenced by the Islamist Palestinian-Jordanian scholar Abu Muhammad al-Maqdesi. Al-Maqdesi is the spiritual father of several Islamist terrorist groupings in Jordan, including the group “Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad” that is currently active in Iraq under Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi. Al-Maqdesi, who is in the past two years has been held under arrest in Jordan without a trial, was the main figure to combine Wahhabi radical Salafism with the global Jihad of Abdallah Azzam, to then create the Jihadi

¹ <http://www.ansarnet.ws/vb/showthread.php?t=16667>



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Salafiyyah, which inspired Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad. Another link to al-Tawhid is Europe, primarily Germany and the United Kingdom, where another Islamist Palestinian ideologue—Omar Abu Omar “Abu Qutadah”—was active. A link to Germany and the Tawhid wal-Jihad was the Egyptian Muhammad Atta, the commander of the September 11 attacks, and operatives linked to the terrorist attack on the Jewish synagogue in Djerba, Tunisia, in April 2002. The attack in Djerba bore the same “Egyptian” nature – the combination of a Jewish target and a group of tourists, this time mostly Germans.

Al-`Aedhi’s analysis mentions several important points to start with:

- The attack was carried out by a new Egyptian group, which was formed only seven months prior to the attack.
- The opening sign to for the new phase of Jihad in Egypt was given by Ayman Zawahiri in his audio clip, a short while before the operation.
- The attack in Sinai was also meant to mark global Jihad’s opposition to Hamas’ policy of limiting the fight against Israel to Palestine proper.
- The direct link between the start of Jihad in Arabia and in Egypt is aimed at warning the Egyptian people that the “infidel Crusaders” would enter every possible country in the Arab world that is governed by “tyranny.”
- The Mujahidin in Arabia assisted their Egyptian colleagues by contributing their Jihadi experience.
- The Sinai attack was only the first of several forthcoming attacks in Egypt, and is part of a clear strategy approved by the Mujahidin in Arabia, Iraq, and Egypt. The Jihad in Iraq and Egypt should be viewed as the ropes to strengthen the Jihad in Arabia.
- The next steps are the beginning of Jihad in Arabia, namely Yemen and Kuwait on the one hand, and the unification of the North African Jihadi groups in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, and the Sudan, on the other.
- The new phase of Jihad in Egypt will not hit the Christian Copts. They might be forced to convert to Islam in the future or pay the special tax of Dhimmis (Jizyah). This constitutes a change from prior periods when Islamist groups targeted Copts in Upper Egypt.
- The strategy of Al-Qaeda organization is to create a class of young Islamists as the vanguard of the Islamic nation in the struggle against the external and internal occupier.



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The main theme of Al-Qaeda's strategy, however, is to place Saudi Arabia and the Jihad groups there, in the center of its gravity, coordinating the Islamist activity with the two "branches" in Iraq and Egypt, as part of this central goal.

Conclusion

Regardless of whether Al-'Aedhi's analysis is a real interpretation of Al-Qaeda's strategy in the Arab world, or merely a reflection of the thoughts of one of its supporters, both Western and Arab governments, would be well advised to take this short article into consideration. The involvement of young Saudi scholars, the most prominent of whom was the late Yousef al-'Uyeri, in sketching the future strategy of Qaedat al-Jihad, is important. They reflect the real aspirations of the first generation of Al-Qaeda and global Jihad leaders, and they are the first audience of the Islamist Jihadi messages.

Whoever reads Al-Zawahiri's book from December 2001—"Knights under the Prophet's Banner"—cannot ignore the first priority of global Jihad, namely the Islamist Jihadis' return to their homelands. The focus on Saudi Arabia reflects the shift of gravity of these scholars and commanders from Egyptians to Saudis and Jordanians.

In October 17, 2004, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi declared that the group he is leading in Iraq—"Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad"—joined Al-Qaeda and he personally took an oath of loyalty to Osama bin Laden. It is still premature to assess the actual meaning of that step. Yet, it might be in accordance with the attempt at creating the new axis between Islamists in Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, under one command and primarily one strategy. All in the framework of "returning home."

The Article -- From Riyadh/East to Sinai

The words of Osama bin Laden on the eve of the invasion of Iraq were the sign to open the Jihad in the Arabian Peninsula. The conditions there were prepared after the Mujahidin had paved the way, right after the first attack against the barracks of the Crusaders in Riyadh in 1416H [November 1995]

This attack, known as Riyadh/East, was the actual start of the Jihad in Arabia. It was launched against three Crusader centers and caused a lot of confusion for the American plans and the Saudi government. It was the start of the confrontation between the soldiers of Allah and the soldiers of tyranny.



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Few days ago Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri gave through his speech the sign to open the Jihad in Egypt. Zawahiri referred to the start of Jihad in Egypt in the same way as he did to the Jihad in Arabia – the Muslims would not wait a long while before the Crusade would enter their country, like what happened in Iraq.

The attack in Sinai was obviously carried out by the organization of Qa`idat al-Jihad. Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri had a vision—by Allah’s mercy—when he pointed out that the Jihad in Palestine was not for the land, but a religious one. He pointed out clearly to the export of the war outside of Palestine, while he was warning about the nationalist trends of Hamas. Hamas and other Palestinian groups, as expected by the Sheikh, hurried to announce that they had nothing to do with the attack. Furthermore, they declared that their battle is only in Palestine, and for Palestine. The Sheikh anticipated it in his speech and warned against it.

The blessed attack in Sinai had long-term dimensions, the same as the attack in Riyadh. Egyptians in Egypt carried out the Sinai attack, yet, with the support of the experience of their brothers in Arabia and elsewhere.

The Sinai attack was just the first of the coming attacks in Egypt, in the framework of a clear strategy approved by the Mujahidin in Arabia, Iraq, and Egypt. The Jihad in Iraq and Egypt should be viewed as the ropes to strengthen the Jihad in Arabia. This is the spring and the generator of the Jihad movements in those countries and others, and in the rest of the Sha`m [Greater Syria] soon.

The Egyptian Jihadi brigade was organized just seven months ago. But, when it was ready then came the sign to place another tile of the Jihad in the region, and to call the people of Egypt to rush into the gates of Paradise. It was the first attack with important goals and dimensions, as was the attack in Riyadh.

The Jihad in Iraq and Egypt is meant to prevent the Saudi government from halting the Jihad in Arabia. It means also that the Algerian and Egyptian experience and tactics, which the Saudis want to use in Arabia, are about to fail. If the complicated strategies of the Mujahidin have embarrassed the leaders of the war against Islam, how about their tails?



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The attacks by Qa`idat al-Jihad mean a variety of advantages in each operation. Furthermore, the start of the Jihad in Kuwait and the Yemen—with Allah's help—would have a great advantage that will serve both the Mujahidin in Iraq and in Arabia equally.

The Mujahidin in Arabia have already shown their direct link to the Mujahidin in Iraq, primarily with the great commander Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. The triple coordination—Arabia, Iraq, and Egypt—will have a tremendous effect on the Jihadi movements in the region. The start of the Jihad in the Yemen and Kuwait, even though it will be in general part of the Jihad in Arabia, will be like a double-edged sword.

The organization of Qa`idat al-Jihad posted a principle, which was not understood by most of its enemies. They think that Qa`idat al-Jihad wants to gain political influence. They do not know that the strategy of the organization of Al-Qaeda is to create a class of young Islamists as the vanguard of the Islamic nation in the struggle against the external and internal occupier. Qa`idat al-Jihad is the revived spirit in the body of the Islamic nation, based upon the blood of the Jihadi vanguard, to wipe from it the dust of humiliation, and to start an Islamic circle of struggle against the global and local tyrants.

Qa`idat al-Jihad has never been a fluid organization that forms itself according to international policies, but has had since the beginning a clear strategy, with complete vision, which was seeking to awaken the nation before fighting the enemy. The September 11 attack had plenty of benefits. Yet, the biggest of them sought by Qa`idat al-Jihad, was the revival of the Islamic nation. That was what the Amir of the Mujahidin Osama bin Laden has pointed out.

It is now the time for the activity of the Mujahidin in Egypt. It is time for the Egyptians to show their Lord what they can accomplish in favor of his religion. The Jihadi strategy in Egypt is going to be in accordance with the Jihad in Arabia. But, it will not target the Egyptian Christians or their churches. Their Jihad could come only after they will have the capability. Islam will be proposed to them, and if they accept they will pay the Jizyah [taxes] otherwise they will be killed.

The strategy from now onward is to attack the Zionists wherever they are in Egypt, and to watch the Americans and their economy, in addition to purifying the Egyptian



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soil from the dirt of the Jews and the Christians, who come to Egypt to spread their corruption there. The believers among the Egyptians deny it. From Egypt will come the groups of defenders of Allah and the Muslim lands and honor.

The Jihad in Egypt means the integration of the North African Jihadi groups in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, and the Sudan, in order to establish a block that would serve as pioneer for the powerful Islamic army in the future great war. This block will fuse with the Mujahidin in Arabia, Iraq, and Greater Syria.

The hopes and goals of the tyrants are over. The Jihad in Egypt will put an end to most of their dreams, which had been embroidered with their Jewish and Christian brothers. This means a Jihad against the Jews and Christians equally. It means also the beginning of the neutralization of the nationalist groups and the exposure of their shame. The Islamic vanguard in these countries, which will be burnt in the flames of war, will prove that they did not emerge for lands, money, or positions, but to defend the Lord's religion and establish his law. Their Jihad has no geographical borders designed by the occupiers. They are pure as the Prophet brought it.

The beginning of Jihad in Egypt means more than what I have just sketched. But, the best we can say is that this Jihad is a copy of the Jihad in Arabia.

With Allah's blessing the brigades of the Mujahidin in Kuwait and the Yemen would start acting in the near future. Then the tyrants will become dwarfs; the monks and clerics of the evil will withdraw; the secularists will cry; and the differentiation we expect so long will start. Allah will differentiate the evil from the good.

Abu al-Abbas al-'Aedhi
24/8/1425H (8 October 2004)