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Abstract: This is a new series of special dispatches that translate and analyze articles, reports, religious decrees, and other documents, written in Arabic by Islamist scholars, clerics, activists, or intellectuals, on major issues of interest.

Hamas Vs. Al-Qaeda: The Condemnation of the Khobar attack By Reuven Paz

Introduction

The relations between the Palestinian Hamas movement and Al-Qaeda and the affiliated groups of Global Jihad, seem to be quite complicated. On one hand, Al-Qaeda and the affiliated Islamist trends of the Salafi-Jihadi or Tawhidi-Jihadi groups, do their best to use the Palestinian issue, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Hamas struggle, for their propaganda, recruitment, fund-raising, and the justification of most of their terrorist attacks. They also adopted from Hamas the *Modus operandi* of suicide attacks and much of the Islamic justification for them. On the other hand, Hamas tended to reject so far attempts to create organizational links with the global Jihad, or to expand its terrorist activity out of Israel and the Palestinian territories¹. The Palestinian Hamas also

¹ On the issue of Hamas' operations outside of Israel, see: Jess Sadick, *The globalization of Hamas Terrorism* (The Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, Washington D.C., 30 January 2004).



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blocked attempts by Al-Qaeda to infiltrate into the Palestinian public. Furthermore, Hamas moved during the past decade through a reinforced process of Palestinian nationalism, operational cooperation with the Shuhada al-Aqsa Brigades of Fatah, and above all – cooperation with Shi'ite Iran and Hizballah. Cooperation with Iran and Hizballah is regarded an “act of high treason” by the Sunni Salafi groups of Global Jihad, who developed in recent years extensive tendencies of *Takfir*—excommunication—towards the Shi`ah, beyond the Wahhabi traditional animosity towards it.

Salafi scholars have criticized Hamas several times in recent years, either for its support for Yaser Arafat, or the nationalist character of its Jihad – Jihad for the sake of the homeland (*Jihad fi sabil al-watan*).² But, in general, in Islamist forums there was lot of sympathy to Hamas by individuals.

Hamas leaders did their best not to link their struggle in Palestine to the global Jihad of Al-Qaeda. There was public sympathy to the general goals of Global Jihad in defense of the Islamic nation, but not clear support for Islamist global terrorism. Hamas leader Khaled Mish'al stated the following in a very long and unique interview with the London-based Arab newspaper Al-Hayat in December 2003:

The vision of Hamas does not permit what is called today violence except in the face of the occupier enemy. Our battle is confined to the Zionists, who occupied our land in Palestine. Although the United States provides most weapons, including Apache helicopters, F-16 planes, and missiles, to Israel, and although it had arrested Dr. Musa Abu Marzouq, we did not open a battle with the United States. We confined our battle to the Israeli occupation. In the Arab arena, there are Islamic groups that have a vision, which permits operations in their own countries against the police and the army. There are also other groups that have a vision, which allows them to open a front with the United States. It is not our business to engage in arguments about the Islamic rulings of these operations. This is the duty of scholars and Ulama. However, our position is always against exercising violence inside our Arab

² See for example: Abd al-Mun'im Mustafa Abu Halimah Abu Basir, *Ma Hakaza Yakun al-Jihad ya Kataeb al-Qassam* (This is not the way of Jihad, Qassam Brigades), 16 January 2002. See on-line in www.abubaseer.com



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and Islamic countries and against the sons of our nation, whatever the justifications and differences.³

Condemnation of the Khobar Attack

In 30 May 2004, Hamas published on its official web site the following press release:⁴

A senior source in the Hamas movement stated as follows:

The Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas declares its severe condemnation and sorrow for the criminal attack that occurred yesterday night in one of the complex of buildings in the town of Khobar in the brother kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which caused the death of dozens of civilians and innocent people.

While we reject this kind of attacks, we wish to emphasize that they harm the security and peace of our countries, and the national and Islamic interests. Therefore, we call those responsible for these attacks to stop them, and preserve the interests and security of their country and nation, especially while our nation is facing external threats and challenges.

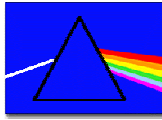
The information office
Sunday, 11 Rabi` al-Thani 1425
May 30th 2004

The Hamas severe statement, initiated probably by Khaled Mish'al, is not surprising in its essence, but by its public pointing at the harmful implications of these terrorist attacks for the Islamic nation.

Behind this statement we should primarily look for Saudi fingerprints. The Saudi government is looking in the past year, since the start of the present series of terrorist attacks by Saudis on its soil in May 2003, for any possible Islamic support for its counter-terrorist campaign. They can easily recruit Arab governments and their Islamic establishments. But, it took a year to recruit Islamic movements, primarily the Muslim Brotherhood, and now Hamas. The standpoint of both the Brotherhood, and Hamas as integral part of their school, is usually backed by the Fatwas of Sheikh Yousef al-Qaradawi, the Egyptian

³ Al-Hayat (London), 8 December 2003, part VI of the interview by Ghassan Sherbel.

⁴ See on-line in: http://www.palestine-info.info/arabic/hamas/statements/2004/30_5_04.htm



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scholar who resides in Qatar. We should expect therefore, a new Fatwa by him in condemnation of the terrorist attacks on Saudi soil, the same as he did following the September 11 attack in the United States.⁵

Conclusion

The statement by Hamas, a day after the operation in Khobar by the Saudi pro-Qaeda elements, might widen the gap between Hamas and the groups of Global Jihad. The later in their turn, would probably continue their efforts to recruit the Palestinian struggle in the service of their interests. But, from the point of view of the Hamas movement, this statement is a clear support for the Saudi “enemy” of Global Jihad.

An interesting issue here is what such a statement could tell us about the post-Yassin era of Hamas. At first look it seems to be a continuation of Yassin’s policy, especially that the more radical leader—Rantisi—was killed too. It seems also that in major lines of policy the external leadership of the movement in Damascus, under Mish’al, is stronger now. Since this leadership is the one that manages all the contacts with the Saudi government and various institutions, primarily for the finance of Hamas, it would accept to be recruited for the Saudi interests against Al-Qaeda and its branches.

It is premature to look at this statement as a sign for change of policy by Hamas. Yet, it might hint that political considerations and maneuvers might be more significant in other fields, such as the future plans in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

⁵ See his fatwa on the September 11 attack, on-line, in:
http://www.qaradawi.net/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=1665&version=1&template_id=130&parent_id=17