

Deterred but Determined: Salafi-Jihadi Groups in the Palestinian Arena

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January 2010

Last summer, Hamas security forces raided a mosque affiliated with the Salafi-Jihadi group Jand Ansar Allah, killing 24 and wounding 130 in the ensuing firefight. This relatively recent episode highlights the presence in Gaza of Salafi-Jihadi groups inspired by but not yet formally affiliated with al-Qaeda. Unlike Hamas, which despite espousing violent Islamism has nevertheless occasionally agreed to short-term ceasefires, Salafi-Jihadi groups champion "pure resistance" in their dealings with Israel. The resulting tension between these groups and Hamas, the latter currently reigning as the political authority in Gaza, has created the perfect environment for further radicalization of Palestinians.

So far, none of the Salafi-Jihadi groups have established formal ties to al-Qaeda, but many intelligence analysts argue that such a relationship could develop quickly given the right combination of circumstances. Should U.S. policymakers be concerned? In The Washington Institute's newest Policy Focus, current and former top counterterrorism officials assess the game-changing potential of a formalized al-Qaeda presence in the West Bank and Gaza, including implications for the wider Arab-Israeli conflict and international counterterrorism efforts. In the troubling words of one senior Palestinian Salafi-Jihadi leader, "So far al-Qaeda has not sponsored our work. We are waiting to carry out a big jihadist operation dedicated to Sheikh Osama bin-Laden."

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THE AUTHORS

Yoram Cohen was a 2009 visiting fellow at The Washington Institute. He has held a variety of positions in the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet), serving until recently as the organization's deputy director. Mr. Cohen is the author, with Jeffrey White, of the 2009 Institute Policy Focus [Hamas in Combat: The Military Performance of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement](#).

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