

Enter al-Qaeda

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Articles & Testimony

And now, al-Qaeda. After many years during which Osama bin Laden and his disciples cursed Israel but never focused their attacks on it, they appear to have started to seriously train their sights in our direction. If, in the past, there were isolated attempts here and there to infiltrate a terrorist into Israel -- attempts that were all, incidentally, thwarted in time -- since Israel's disengagement from Gaza last summer the organization has been concentrating its efforts on building an infrastructure in the Palestinian territories, and just as worrying, among the Palestinians of South Lebanon and in Sinai and Jordan.

One result was the surprise barrage of Katyushas fired at Kiryat Shmonah and Shlomi on Israel's northern border on December 27. Prior to that, there was another Katyusha attack in July 2005, the source of which remains a mystery till today. Then there was the firing of Katyushas from the Jordanian port city of Aqaba toward Eilat in August 2005, the November 2005 suicide bombings at the luxury hotels of Amman that were described by al-Qaeda as "dens of Zionist spies," and the deadly attacks in the Egyptian Sinai against the hotels in Sharm el-Sheikh in July 2005, and before that in Taba, in October 2004. Altogether, this conglomeration of incidents proves that a new front has opened up, and that the monstrous "Global Jihad" machine is determined to pay us a visit.

The background to this change was well articulated in the now famous letter intercepted in October 2005 by Israeli intelligence on its way from Ayman Zawahiri, bin Laden's deputy, to Abu Musab Zarqawi, the head of the terror campaign in Iraq. In it, the veteran Egyptian terrorist stresses that the historic struggle against the "Crusaders" and their Muslim lackeys will come to a head in the countries of the Levant: Syria, Jordan and Palestine. The reason: that only a victory of Sunni fundamentalism in those countries can prevent Iran and its clients from establishing an arc of Shi'ite hegemony stretching from Tehran, through Baghdad and Damascus, and via Hizballah, to the Mediterranean coast.

The strategic assessment of the al-Qaeda leadership is that the organization is already capable of carrying out a large enough volume of terror attacks inside Iraq to hasten the Americans' departure and prevent the pro-Iranian Shi'ite movements from expanding into areas beyond the southern region. So Zarqawi, "the Emir" of al-Qaeda in the "Land of the Two Rivers," is relocating some of his foot soldiers from Iraq to the countries of the Levant. In Syria, a group known as Jund Muhammad (Muhammad's Army) has resumed activity, as has a Zarqawi branch known as the "al-Qaeda Organization in Syrian Lands," which was behind the attacks in Jordan. In Sinai, a mixed Beduin-Palestinian wing of al-Qaeda is operating under the new name "al-Qaeda Organization in the Land of the Nile." In the Gaza Strip, a young group appeared by the name "al-Qaeda Organization in the Border Districts," and in Lebanon, an old, long-dormant organization called Usbat al-Ansar (the Association of the Faithful) has sprung back to life. It was their people who aimed the recent Katyushas at the Galilee.

Zarqawi, speaking on a tape broadcast on the Internet on January 9, explained that the December bombardment of "the sons of apes and pigs" was just an appetizer for a series of attacks that Bin Laden has personally ordered. There is no reason to doubt him.

The entry of al-Qaeda into the Israeli arena, as in the other surrounding countries, is creating tension between the

newcomers and the established organizations of political Islam. Al-Qaeda and Hizballah are waging a battle of insults and mutual recrimination, while at the beginning of the year, the Muslim Brotherhood launched the first propaganda campaign of its kind against al-Qaeda in all its branches throughout the Arab world. The confrontation with Hizballah is essentially a continuation of the bloody campaign Zarqawi has been waging against the Shi'ites in Iraq. Al-Qaeda does not consider the Shi'ites to be proper Muslims and they call Hizballah, for example, "Hizb-Allat," after one of the idols destroyed by the Prophet Muhammad. The Muslim Brotherhood's decision to go public in its rejection of al-Qaeda springs from the realization that it is a dangerous rival for dominance among the Sunni radicals - a rival that mocks the Brotherhood's gains in the recent parliamentary elections in Egypt, and that aspires to resume the terror war against the Mubarak regime.

This climate change of course affects the Palestinian environment as well. Hamas cooperates with Iran, but it preserves its identity as the Palestinian arm of the Muslim Brotherhood. As such, it is strongly tied to the forces interested in hampering the penetration of al-Qaeda, its agents and its ideology. It is already possible to detect deep anxiety in Hamas lest the ongoing cease-fire to which they are committed pushes the youth to seek more stimulating adventures in al-Qaeda's court. Islamic Jihad, for its part, as a proxy of Iranian intelligence, is explaining to its people that Zarqawi's doctrine of Neo-Salafism, or militant Sunni jihad, is not compatible with that of Ayatollah Khomeini.

And in Lebanon, both Hizballah and Fatah were astonished by the firing of Katyushas at Israel by Ussat al-Ansar and are confining its 300-400 operatives to their quarters in the Ein al-Hilweh refugee camp near Sidon. Hizballah's Sheikh Nasrallah has no intention of giving up exclusive control over the decision if and when to fire at Israel's border.

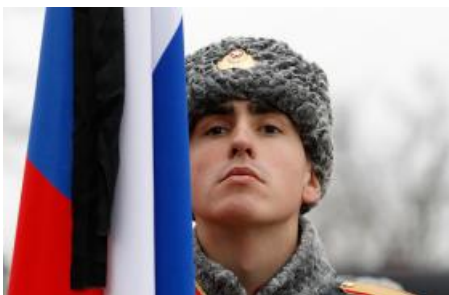
This fight between the major ideological Islamist movements will also be taking place in our immediate area, and sometimes on our own soil. This is the main contemporary struggle in the Middle East, now that it has become clear that the secular liberal forces are still too weak to mount a challenge for the birthright.

Al-Qaeda, Hizballah, Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood will all be fighting for a share of the booty from the turmoil of Iraq, from the expected collapse in Syria and from the anarchy reigning in the Palestinian Authority.

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