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Israel and the Salafi
Jihadi Threat

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The security challenges facing Israel are complex and multi-faceted. While there is today no immediate existential threat facing the country, it is generally accepted that the most acute security issues facing Israel derive from the regional ambitions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Through its mobilizing of proxy forces, its ballistic missile program, its nuclear ambitions and its openly stated desire for the destruction of Israel, Iran constitutes a potent challenge.

The unresolved conflict with the Palestinians is an additional major security 'file', dealt with through a measure of security cooperation with the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, which uneasily exists alongside an ongoing political conflict, and through the maintenance of deterrence against Hamas-controlled Gaza.

In addition to these two arenas, events of recent years in the Middle East have produced a third category of threats, which has received relatively little public attention. This is the proliferation of Salafi Jihadi terror groups in the ungoverned or poorly governed spaces that have emerged as a by-product of the political turmoil in neighboring countries over the last decade. The Salafi-jihadi political stream remains a potent though minority trend among all Sunni Arab populations in the Levant and Iraq.

The historical record suggests that the Salafis lack political sophistication. Their attempts at building polities, most recently the pseudo-caliphate of the Islamic State organization in Iraq and Syria, have ended in failure. However, as insurgent organizations, mobilizing their adherents for ongoing campaigns of violence against the authorities, Salafi-jihadi groups have proved durable and potent enemies.

Salafi-jihadi organizations exist in all the areas adjoining Israel – in the West Bank, Jordan, the Gaza Strip, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. Their potency exists in direct proportion to the absence of strong central authority. Thus, in Jordan and along the Jordan Valley, because of the presence of the IDF in the latter area and the Jordanian authorities in the former, Salafi jihadi organizations remain a minor irritant. In the West Bank, due to security cooperation between Israel and the PA, the efforts of the Salafis to organize have produced only sporadic results. In Gaza, the Hamas authorities tolerate a measure of Salafi activity as a means of pressuring Israel, while firmly clamping down on any attempt by Salafi groups to assert a political challenge to Hamas rule in the Strip.

In southern Lebanon, similarly, Hizballah's domination prevents independent activity by Salafi groups. But the Shia Islamist organization on occasion makes use of the Salafis as an additional tool of pressure on Israel. The two areas in which the potential challenge of Salafi-jihadi groups to Israeli security is most keenly felt are in northern

Sinai and in south-west Syria. These are also the ‘least governed’ spaces adjacent to Israel. In both areas, Salafi-jihadi groups affiliated with the Islamic State are active. In northern Sinai, the Wilaya al-Sina (Sinai Province) organization, formerly known as Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, is engaged in insurgency against the Egyptian authorities. Despite ongoing efforts by the Egyptian army, the group remains potent and active. In south west Syria, the IS-affiliated Khaled ibn al-Walid Army controls a strip of territory from the town of Tasil down to the border with Jordan, which adjoins the Israeli-controlled part of the Golan Heights. The greater part of the area of Quneitra Province has been controlled by the Syrian Sunni Arab rebels since 2012. The rebels are opposed to Khaled Ibn al Walid but have proved unable to dislodge it from the area of territory it controls.

Salafi-Jihadi Groups Surrounding Israel



The fragmentation or weakening of a number of Arab states is the main de facto result of the internal unrest that has hit the Arab world since 2010. Salafi jihadi organizations are proliferating among the ruins, in places adjoining Israel's borders. This paper will look in detail at the nature of this oft-ignored emergent security challenge. We will observe the situation in northern Sinai, south west Syria, the West Bank, Israel, and the Gaza Strip. We will begin, however, with a short explanation regarding the place of Salafi-jihadi ideology within the broader spectrum of Sunni political Islam.

What is Salafi-Jihadi Islamism?

Salafism is a broad trend of ultra-conservative Sunni Islam. It seeks, as its name suggests, to emulate the practices and lifestyle of the 'Salaf as-saliheen', or 'pious ancestors'. These are identified as the first three generations of scholars after Mohammed, including his companions and followers. These are seen as representing an eternal model for all Muslims, in their belief, modes of worship, moral conduct and even styles of dress and daily practices. Salafis practice a literal reading of the Koran, rejecting all discussion and metaphorical interpretations of it and of the Sunna (prophetic traditions). They reject all 'innovation' (bidah) in Islam.

While many Salafis have tended toward political quietism, seeking to live separately from society, Salafi jihadis constitute a sub group who consider that jihad (religiously sanctioned warfare) is an obligation (*fard 'ayn*) on all Muslims, and that this must be realized by self-organization among pious Muslims, because current Muslim states and rulers are illegitimate, and because Islam must be established throughout the world. This idea is at the root of the Salafi-jihadi outlook. Tactical differences may then exist between those who stress attacks on the west and those who prefer warfare against local administrations. But it is the combination of a pristine and purist political-religious ideology with a praxis of violent activity seen as in the tradition of the early days of Islam which explains both the appeal of the Salafi-jihadist outlook to its adherents and its limitations as a guide to practical action (the latter because of the extreme absence of even tactical pragmatism which tends to characterize these organizations, leading them to adopt methods and approaches which prevent sustained political success). We will now go on to look in detail at the practical manifestations of this trend in the area surrounding Israel.

Wilaya Sina

Wilaya Sina, formerly known as Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, emerged from pre-existing Salafi circles in northern Sinai in 2011, against the background of the uprising in Egypt which led to the resignation of then President Hosni Mubarak. It had links to Salafi circles in Gaza and, as its name would suggest, (Beit al Maqdis is an Arabic, Hebrew-inspired term for Jerusalem), it was initially focused on the fight against Israel. In this regard,

Ansar Beit al-Maqdis came to prominence because of its multiple attacks on the pipeline running through Sinai then taking gas from Egypt to Israel. Following the military coup of July 3, 2013 and the return of the army to power, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis refocused its attentions on the Egyptian army, beginning a succession of large scale and high level attacks against military and other state personnel in the Sinai area. These included an attempt to assassinate then Egyptian Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim.

Contacts between the group and the Islamic State began in 2014, at the point of greatest expansion of IS. Ansar Beit al-Maqdis formally pledged 'Baya' (allegiance) to the Islamic State in November 13, 2014, at that point changing its name to Wilaya Sina – Sinai province (of the notional Islamic State).

The organization has since 2013 been engaged in a determined insurgency against the Egyptian state, which has included some very high profile acts of terror. Since 2014, the Egyptian authorities have maintained a buffer zone between Sinai and the Gaza Strip in response to the increasing intensity of the problem. The most deadly single attack for which the group claimed responsibility was the downing over Sinai of Russian Metrojet Flight 9268, on October 31, 2015, with the loss of 224 lives. This attack was carried out in opposition to Russia's involvement in Syria. On July 1, 2015, Wilaya Sina launched its largest scale ground attack until that point – an attack on the town of Sheikh Zweid in Sinai, which resulted in the deaths of around 100 fighters of the organization and 17 members of the Egyptian security forces. The attack revealed a newfound tactical sophistication from the organization – Wilaya Sina fighters used suicide bombers in the combat in a way pioneered by IS in Iraq and Syria. They also utilized mortars as part of their assault.

The July 2015 attacks marked a qualitative transformation of the Sinai insurgency. In response, Egypt established a unified military command for the area east of the Suez Canal. Led by Lieutenant-General Roshdy Askar, the command was intended to coordinate the counter terror activities of the Egyptian Second and Third Armies.

Since 2015, Wilaya Sina has maintained a constant tempo of attacks on Egyptian targets. Periodically, the group has also targeted Israel. Thus, on July 3, 2015, the organization fired three Grad rockets into southern Israel. In February 2017, again four grad rockets were fired on the southern Israeli city of Eilat. Three were intercepted by the Israeli Iron Dome system.

Egyptian security forces are making ongoing effort to combat the organization. The scope and efforts both of the security forces efforts and of the insurgency, however, have sharply increased since 2015. Many observers now point to Sinai as the next main 'front' of confrontation between Salafi jihadi and western supported forces in the Middle East. The volume of attacks doubled between the last quarter of 2015 and the second quarter of 2016.

Toward the end of 2016, the Egyptian armed forces began to report some successes in the war. A decline in the number of attacks was claimed in August, 2016. On August

4, the Egyptian army claimed to have killed the leader of Wilaya Sina, identified as Abu Duaa al-Ansari. However, no other sources confirmed this claim, and even al-Ansari's status and identity was in doubt, with all previous reports naming Abu Osama al-Masri as the leader of the organization.

The insurgency continued at a steady rate of attrition in the subsequent period, before another qualitative leap in its intensity took place in late 2017. On November 24, 2017, Wilaya al Sina carried out its largest and most sophisticated attack to date. 40 gunmen attacked the Sufi al-Rawda mosque east of Bir al-Abed in north Sinai. The attacks resulted in the deaths of 311 people and the wounding of an additional 122. It was the most deadly terror attack in Egypt's history. It also revealed a further leap in Wilaya Sina's tactical proficiency. The attackers used burning cars to block off escape routes, and launched a second wave of attacks as ambulances arrived to evacuate the wounded. RPGs were used as well as small arms.

Egypt was shocked at the extent and the sophistication of the attack. President Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi declared that the attack would 'not go unpunished' and three days of national mourning were declared. No group claimed responsibility, though the location of the attack and the nature of it make it almost beyond doubt that Wilaya Sina was responsible.

In recent weeks, Egypt has sought to respond to the attacks. On February 10, 2018, a large-scale offensive began, involving both airstrikes and raids on strongholds of the insurgency. President Sisi has set a three-month deadline for the defeat of the insurgency.

Israel has adopted a strongly supportive stance toward Egyptian efforts to break the Salafi jihadi insurgency in Sinai. Indeed, recent revelations show that for the last two years' Israeli drones, helicopters and jet aircraft have participated in operations against the insurgents in northern Sinai, in cooperation with Egyptian forces. Israel has also permitted Egypt to bring aircraft and ground forces into the Sinai area beyond the amounts allowed according to the provisions of the 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. Israel has also assisted the Egyptians in the field of intelligence.

It is, however, far from certain that the current Egyptian offensive will deliver the hoped-for defeat and eclipse of Wilaya Sina. Egypt is attempting to crush the jihadis using superior force and heavy weaponry. Its tactics are sometimes harsh. Thousands of residents have been evacuated and hundreds of homes destroyed in the establishment of buffer zones close to the border. No real attempt has been made to address some of the grievances of the people of northern Sinai, which may play a role in the level of support afforded the insurgents. Lack of services, health care and educational opportunities are part of the reality of northern Sinai.

The approach being taken is not one that has no successful precedents, and indeed it resembles the approach to insurgency taken by authoritarian Arab regimes elsewhere in the region and in other periods. However, as of now it does not appear to be producing success for the Egyptians. Rather, a small insurgent group of not more than

1500 fighters remains actively engaged in insurgency after four years of determined attempts by the Egyptians to defeat it. Cairo has proven reluctant to adopt an intelligence-led counter-insurgency approach to northern Sinai. The Egyptian army remains dominated by senior officers who served in conventional frontline units, for whom an approach focusing on intelligence and commando operations is unfamiliar. There is a large degree of conservatism and resistance to change in the upper ranks of the military.

This issue is compounded by the concern that with the decline of the Islamic State as an entity controlling territory in Iraq and Syria, militants formerly active in that area may have made or be making their way to Sinai in order to join the insurgency there. The tactical proficiency displayed in recent attacks, reminiscent of IS operations in Iraq and Syria, suggests this may well be the case.

The current Egyptian offensive against Wilaya Sina is still under way, and may yet bear fruit. There are some indications that the jihadis are hard pressed. Recent reports have detailed friction between the organization and the Tarrabin, a powerful Beduin tribe in the northern Sinai which had previously cooperated with the jihadis. The Tarrabin reportedly ended cooperation with Wilaya Sina because of the loss of local civilian lives in the attack on the Rawda mosque. Previous relations of pragmatic cooperation with the Hamas authorities in Gaza have also broken down. Nevertheless, Wilaya Sina is far from defeated, and it is not certain that the current Egyptian offensive, or more broadly the methods being employed by the Egyptian authorities will succeed in destroying or severely damaging the group.

In addition to Wilaya Sina, a smaller al Qaeda affiliated group, Jaysh al Islam (Army of Islam) is also active in the northern Sinai area. This group emerged in 2011. Relations between the two groups are fractious, and there have been incidents of violence between them.

Khaled Ibn al Walid Army

Located in Quneitra and Deraa Provinces in Syria, and controlling a strip of territory adjacent to the Israeli controlled part of the Golan Heights, the Khaled Ibn al Walid Army is generally considered to be a franchise of the Islamic State. It has made no formal declaration of Baya (allegiance) to the Caliphate, but its activities are covered by official IS media outlets which express their support for the group.

Thought to number around 1500-2000 fighters, the organization is the de facto ruling authority in the area from the town of Tassil down to the meeting point of the Jordanian, Syrian and Israeli borders. The group was founded on May 21, 2016 in the Yarmouk Basin area of south west Dera'a Governorate, by the merging of three smaller Salafi jihadi factions – the Yarmouk Martyrs' Brigade, the Jaish al-Jihad and the Harakat

al-Muthanna al-Islamiyya group. The Khaled Ibn al-Walid Army was led until his assassination in November 2016, by Abu Hashem al-Shami, (sometimes known as Abu Hashem al-Himawi), who is thought to have been despatched by the IS leadership to take command after the merger. Following his killing (probably by other members of his own organization), the movement has been led by Abu Mohamed al-Maqdisi, a Palestinian.

In accordance with well-known IS practices, this organization imposes a very harsh and draconian rule upon those resident in its area of control. It has carried out public beheadings in the town of Shajara, forced both men and women to dress in accordance with Salafi norms (full niqab for women, beards and trousers revealing ankles for men), imprisoned in cages those caught smoking, and carried out amputations for thefts. The more bizarre aspects of IS rule have also been evident. In August, 2017, members of the organization cut down a tree located within their area of control because they suspected locals of worshipping it.

The organization clashes regularly with non-jihadi factions in the area. It has also on occasion clashed with Israel. As a franchise of Islamic State, Khaled Ibn al-Walid Army is of course committed in principle to the destruction of the Jewish State. It is not, however, actively engaged in attacks on Israel. This is because its main concern is to maintain its area of control and avoid destruction at the hands of the surrounding rebel forces. It has no desire to provoke Israel, with its vastly superior capacities. Nevertheless, in November 2016, a clash took place between IDF forces and members of the organization, on the Syrian side of the border. The clash resulted in the deaths of a number of members of KWA, but has not since been repeated. It appears to have taken place at the initiative of the fighters on the ground and did not presage a change in KWA strategy toward Israel. Nevertheless, Israel continues to watch developments carefully. Some researchers consider that as in Sinai, Israel is probably making clandestine efforts to weaken KWA, in cooperation with local allies. In this case, the relevant local partners would be Jordan, the anti-IS coalition and local anti-jihadi rebel groups.

Salafi groups in Gaza

Gaza has been under de facto Hamas rule since 2007. In the course of that period, Salafi organizations have emerged to constitute a significant political and military trend. The tendency of the Hamas authorities has been to violently suppress Salafi groups when they sought to offer a political challenge to the Hamas authorities, while broadly tolerating them when they did not.

Most famously, in 2008, an attempt by the Salafi Jund Ansar Allah group to proclaim an Islamic Emirate at the Sheikh Al Salam Bin Taymiyah mosque in Khan Yunis resulted in a harsh crackdown by the authorities and the deaths of 28 people.

A second crackdown occurred in 2011, after Salafi activists murdered Vittorio Arrigoni, an Italian far-left supporter of the Palestinians, in Khan Yunis.

A myriad of small, armed Salafi groupings exist in the Gaza Strip, of which Jund Ansar Allah was one. These groups are part of a broader subculture, estimated to command the loyalty of at least 50,000 people, and probably many more. The Taliban style of dress adopted by supporters of Salafism has become a familiar sight in Gaza.

A number of Gaza mosques are known to be controlled by the Salafis. Sheikh Al Salam Bin Taymiyah mosque in Khan Yunis, which was the center of operations for the Jund Ansar Allah group, was one of these. Abu Noor al-Makdisi, who led the Jund Ansar Allah group and died during the Hamas crackdown in 2008, was the imam at this mosque. Other mosques linked to the Salafis include the al-Sahabah Mosque in Daraj, Gaza City, and the al-Albani Mosque in the Jabalya refugee camp.

Salafi activity is reportedly well-financed, with money coming in from private sources in the Gulf. As one source put it “millions of petrodollars are flowing in every month.”

The myriad Salafi armed groupings include the Jaish al-Islam (army of Islam), al-Saif al-Haq Islamiyya (Swords of Islamic Righteousness), Jaish al-Umma (Army of the Nation) and the Jaljalat (thunder) group, formed by disaffected former Hamas fighters during the period of the cease-fire, in June 2008. Jund Ansar Allah, which was founded in November, 2008, also emerged from this milieu.

The relations of the Hamas rulers of the Strip to this Salafi sub-culture are complex. Since Hamas took power in the Strip, the Salafis have engaged in numerous acts of violence against people and institutions believed to be kufar (infidel). These have included attacks on Internet cafes, book shops, beauty parlors and institutions representing the Strip’s small Christian community. Young women and men suspected of engaging in “immoral” behavior have been murdered.

The Hamas authorities officially oppose such behavior, but have done little to stop or deter it. A non-violent Salafi political party, al-Nour, has attempted to organize in the Strip since 2012, facing periodic repression from the authorities.

There is also a certain crossover between Hamas structures and the Salafis. Many members of Hamas’s al-Kassam brigades are known to support Salafi ideas. A prominent Salafi preacher in the Strip, Adnan Mayyat, is a former Hamas militant. The rulers of the Strip face a certain dilemma regarding this trend, in that Hamas derives its authority from its commitment to Islam, and as such it is problematic for the movement to be seen to be engaged in the suppression of a trend which follows a yet more stringent interpretation of Islam. Hamas, however, draws the line at activity which appears to challenge its own authority or right to rule.

A key question concerning the Salafi subculture in Gaza is the extent of the presence of support for Islamic State and global al-Qaida among it. Most experts believe that the al-Qaida network is present to only a very limited extent in the Strip. The al-Qaida idea, however, is flourishing, with a large number of the often quite primitively-armed and poorly-trained Salafi groups competing to be considered the “official franchise” of al-Qaida in Gaza.

Similarly, the declaration of the Caliphate by the Salafi Islamic State in Iraq and Syria group in June, 2014 had a galvanizing effect on the Salafi subculture in Gaza. A number of organizations in the Strip pledged support for the Islamic State, including Majlis Shura Mujahidin, Ansar al-Dawla al-Islamiya, Ansar al-Sharia Bayt al-Maqdis, al Nusra al Maqdisi, and al-Dawla al-Islamiya (Schweitzer). However, these pledges were not accepted by IS itself and there is little evidence of direct support or funding from IS to these groups. The inability of the Palestinian Salafi groups to unify under a single banner may well be a contributing factor to this. IS may also have seen Wilaya Sina as its franchise in the area, making any other connections superfluous, particularly because IS does not of course accept the national boundaries between Sinai and Gaza as having either legitimacy or meaning.

With Hamas deterred by Israeli military campaigns in 2008-9, 2012 and 2014, the Salafis have sought to claim the mantle of armed militancy against Israel. A number of organizations have engaged in sporadic rocket fire from the Strip against Israeli targets.

2015 saw an uptick in tensions between the Salafis and the Hamas rulers of Gaza. There were violent clashes in the Yarmouk refugee camp between Salafis and the authorities and Hamas destroyed a Salafi mosque in Deir el-Balah. An anticipated general conflict in the Strip has not yet materialized, however.

Pro-IS groups in Gaza have provided manpower both for Wilaya Sina in Sinai and for the main IS war in Syria and Iraq. A Gazan battalion within IS in Syria, the Abu Nur al Maqdisi Battalion (named after the Sheikh who declared the Islamic Emirate in Gaza in 2008 and was killed by Hamas), was active for a while. The precise number of Gazans who fought in Syria within the framework of this organization is unknown, but at least one Gazan, Abu Mansur al-Ghazawi, achieved high ‘office’ within the governing structures of IS. He was appointed ‘Wali’ (governor) of the areas of Aleppo Province in Syria controlled by IS at its height.

The Salafis in Gaza remain an important political and military subculture. Their independent attacks on Israeli targets, and Hamas’s unwillingness to launch a general campaign for their suppression make it possible that they could precipitate a renewed conflict between Israel and Gaza. However, their poor organization and fractiousness, coupled with the continued strength of Palestinian nationalism as a mobilizing cause among Gazans probably limits the appeal of Salafi political Islam in this context. It is likely that the Salafi structures in Gaza will survive without in the immediate future rising to pose a real challenge to Hamas’s control of the Strip.

Salafism in the West Bank and Israel

A Salafi subculture of considerable size exists in the West Bank, centred on east Jerusalem and the city of Hebron. For the most part, its adherents are not engaged in violence. The Hizb al-Tahrir party is the most significant political force within this subculture. This party, founded in Jerusalem in 1953, stresses its commitment to the re-establishment of the Caliphate. It has spread throughout the world, finding many adherents in the Indian sub-continent and Central Asia. However, while it was established and has continued to be led by Palestinians, Hizb al-Tahrir has never succeeded in offering a serious challenge to the domination of Palestinian politics by Arab nationalist and Muslim Brotherhood inspired ideologies and movements. In part, this may be because the party has traditionally opposed paramilitary activity and armed confrontation. Instead, it stresses educational and political activity in order to create an Islamic state, whose conventional forces will then be used for warfare against non-Muslims. In this way, an aggressive ideology produces little actual violence.

In recent years, however, the Salafi subculture in the West Bank has been the incubator for a number of Salafi jihadi initiatives and manifestations, influenced by al-Qaeda and IS ideology. In November, 2013, for example, Israeli security forces killed two members of a Salafi jihadi cell based in Yatta, near Hebron. In December, 2013, Palestinian security forces rounded up 20 Salafis in Nablus, Jenin and Qalqilya. Some analysis at that time predicted a role of growing importance for the Salafis on the West Bank. However, since that time there have been no further major manifestations of organized and violent Salafi activity. Rather, Hizb al-Tahrir has continued to organize politically and hold demonstrations in Hebron and east Jerusalem. Similarly, in Israel proper, a Salafi political subculture exists, but in so far as its adherents wish to embrace Salafi jihadi activities, this has tended to manifest itself in their departing for destinations elsewhere in the region to pursue their jihadi activities.

There have been some exceptions. In 2010, Sheikh Nazim Abu Salim was convicted of establishing an al-Qaeda linked Salafi jihadi group called Jama'at Ansar Allah-Bayt al Maqdis-al Nasira.

In January, 2015, seven Arab citizens of Israel from the Nazareth area were arrested and charged with association with the Islamic State and preparing to carry out acts of terror in its name. The leader of the cell was Adnan Sa'id Alla-a-Din, a lawyer. In August of that year, a second cell, also in the Nazareth area, was apprehended. Centered on the village of Kafr Yafiya, the cell's members engaged in training with weapons. They were in contact with individuals from Yafiya who had gone to Syria to join Islamic State. In October 2015, a 23 year old Israeli Arab from the town of Jaljulya flew a hang glider across the border to enlist with a forerunner of the Khaled Ibn al Walid Army in Quneitra. Six residents of the Shuafat refugee camp in Jerusalem were arrested in October 2016 and charged with planning to join Islamic State.

These notable incidents notwithstanding, the total number of Arab citizens of Israel who left to join Islamic State or other Islamist rebel groups in Syria is less than 100. This is a not negligible number, of course, but from a total number of 1.7 million Arab Muslims in Israel, it represents a far smaller proportionate number than the corresponding figure for both France and the UK.

Conclusion

Observation of the activities of Salafi jihadi organizations on Israel's borders and within Israel itself indicates that this trend represents a notable though secondary security challenge. Salafi groups, unlike Israel's Shia Islamist enemy Hizballah, lack state sponsorship and support. Unlike the Muslim Brotherhood and Arab nationalist trends among the Palestinians, they do not enjoy mass support. Nevertheless, elements among them are linked to powerful trans-national networks, namely al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, and they have succeeded on occasion in carrying out attacks.

It is noteworthy that Salafi jihadi groups achieve their highest level of organization in areas where the state is very weak or non-existent. Thus, the threat from Jordan is very minor. In Lebanon, the state is weak but Hizballah constitutes a powerful de facto authority which occasionally allows Salafi groups to operate against Israel but for the most part represents a barrier against them, even as it prosecutes its own war against Israel.

In Israel and the West Bank, Israel's own powerful security services in cooperation with the structures of the Palestinian Authority ensure that Salafi circles are subject to surveillance and their attempts to organize have been swiftly frustrated.

In south west Syria, the Gaza Strip and northern Sinai, by contrast, state structures have been weak or ineffective. In Syria, the Assad regime lost control of the border area in 2012 and its reconquest is not immediately imminent. The hold of the Khaled Ibn Walid army on a section of the border looks set to prevail for the immediate future. In Gaza, the Hamas authorities prefer to permit the Salafis to organize while preventing them from challenging Hamas rule.

In northern Sinai, the writ of the Egyptian state has historically been limited. As a result of this, in the northern part of the peninsula smugglers and jihadis have been able to pursue their interests with impunity. For the last four years, a full-scale insurgency has been under way in the area against the Egyptian authorities. There has so far been only limited success in addressing this by the Egyptian authorities. A full-scale offensive by the Egyptian security forces is now under way. It remains to be seen if this offensive will finally achieve the goal of breaking the Salafi insurgency in Sinai. The broader problem for Israel of Salafi jihadi organizations is likely to persist for as long as collapsed states and poorly or partially governed areas exist along its borders. The Salafi jihadis will thus continue to constitute a significant, if secondary security challenge for Israel.

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