



# ISIS's al-Qurashi's declaration of war on Israel

Dr. Ely Karmon  
January, 2020

On January 27, 2020, ISIS released a new audio speech by its spokesman Abu Hamzah Al-Qurashi, produced by its media arm Al-Furqan and distributed on social media. Al-Qurashi delivers a defiant message: ISIS is not only surviving, despite the declarations by consecutive U.S. presidents that it was finished, but it is also expanding its war against its enemies and that war now spans the globe. Notable in the speech was Al-Qurashi's declaration of war on Israel, calling on ISIS factions in the Sinai and Syria to attack it and urging Muslims to thwart the U.S. peace plan referred to as the "Deal of the Century." Urging ISIS fighters to step up their attacks, he called on Muslims everywhere to "emigrate" and join the ISIS branch nearest them.<sup>1</sup>

## ISIS and Israel

ISIS was practically not interested in attacking Israeli targets from Syria, when it could have done so easily during the years 2014-2017. The main priority was the Damascus regime and the Syrian army and many times its competitors in the jihadist arena, like Jabhat al-Nusra. ISIS was afraid to suffer the brunt of the Israeli air force, which could have weakened it in the fight for supremacy in the Syrian opposition camp.

The situation has been different in Israel's South, where the ISIS forces in the Sinai "Wilaya" considered Israel as its second priority after the Egyptian army, security and police forces, and its institutions.

In April 2012, Eilat was targeted from Sinai by rocket-fire for the first time after the 2011 popular uprising in Egypt. In total, there were seven rocket attacks against Israel in 2012 – most fired toward Eilat. In 2013, five rockets were launched towards Eilat in three incidents. In just the first month of 2014, there were two separate rocket attacks on Eilat. These have caused no casualties and minimal damage. Ansar Bayt al Maqdis ("Supporters of Jerusalem", ABM), the precursor of ISIS, has taken credit for rocket strikes against Israel.

In spring 2016, Israeli security experts claimed that ISIS has signaled that it's planning a sophisticated attack on Israel from the Sinai. Threatening messages to that effect came directly from ISIS. In a video message released on December 26, 2015, ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi addressed Israel: "We are getting closer to you day by day. Do not think that we have forgotten about you." In October 2017 ISIS took credit for two rockets fired from Sinai into southern Israel.

According to a March 2018 New York Times report, the Israeli air force (IAF) cooperates with Egyptian army to bomb ISIS targets in the Sinai Peninsula, striking over 100 times over two years. Egypt's military spokesperson vehemently denied the report. ISIS also claimed from time to time that Israel carried out attacks against its forces in the Sinai.

The Frenchman Mehdi Nemmouche perpetrated the only ISIS attack against a Jewish target, shooting four people at Brussels' Jewish museum on May 24, 2014, two months before the declaration of the Caliphate in Mosul. The attack was the first carried out in Europe by a jihadist returning from fighting in Syria.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.memri.org/reports/isis-spokesman-dismisses-trumps-declarations-annihilating-isis-declares-war-israel-oh>

## Why ISIS focus on Israel?

The change of ISIS strategy under the orders of the new leader Abu Ibrahim Al-Hashemi Al-Qurashi resembles the decision of Osama bin-Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri, after the demise of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan by the end of 2001, to play the Palestinian card and attack Israeli and Jewish targets.

Until his ouster from Afghanistan in winter 2001/2, the heart of the struggle for bin Laden was the expulsion of the American presence from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, although he promised not to forget “the blood spilled in Palestine and Iraq... the massacre of Qana, in Lebanon... and the massacres in Tajikistan, Burma, Kashmir, Assam, the Philippines, Fatani, Ogadin, Somalia, Eritrea, Chechnia, and in Bosnia-Herzegovina.” Bin Laden has been criticized at the time in the Arab world for focusing on such places as Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and he therefore started to concentrate more on the Palestinian issue.

He and al-Zawahiri, increasingly referred to the Palestinian issue as a top priority in the videos and audios they released; in parallel, there was a sharp escalation in attacks by jihadist groups against Jewish and Israeli targets.

The first major attack after the expulsion from Afghanistan was the suicide bombing on 11 April 2002 outside a historic synagogue in Djerba, Tunisia. On November 28, 2002 three suicide car bombers blew up a hotel popular with Israelis in the Kenyan resort of Mombasa, killing 15 people. On the same day, two missiles narrowly missed an Israeli Arkia Boeing 757 carrying 261 passengers on take-off from Mombasa airport. Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attacks. On 16 May 2003, 15 suicide bombers attacked five targets in Casablanca, Morocco, killing 43 persons and wounding 100. These were a Spanish restaurant, a Jewish community center, a Jewish cemetery, a hotel, and the Belgian consulate.

This sudden interest in Jewish and Israeli targets seems to have been a consequence of the attempts of al-Qaeda and its associated groups to jump on the bandwagon of what was considered at that stage to be a very successful violent intifada by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and other Palestinian groups. While this activity enabled them to claim support for the Palestinian people, it also generated an anti-Jewish and anti-Israel terrorist campaign which would win solidarity from the Arab and Muslim masses and possibly attract young recruits to their ranks.

ISIS, after the loss of its territorial strongholds in Syria and Iraq, the killing of its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi by U.S. Special Forces, absence of major terrorist attacks in the West and even in the Middle East, and the designation of a new practically unknown leader, needs to reaffirm itself and find a topic to galvanize the Muslims worldwide, and especially in the Middle East.

By mentioning President Trump’s “Deal of the Century” and asking the Muslim youth to ignore “the Hamas of apostasy and collaboration and its ilk, the factions of shame, the dogs of Iran and its base, foolish servants,” ISIS evaluates that the Israeli implementation of the American plan by annexation of new Palestinian territories will provoke violent reactions of the young masses both in the West Bank and Gaza and hopes to attract to its ranks many of this angry militants and “lone wolves.”

The ISIS’s threat in the “declaration of war’ on Israel should be taken seriously, not only by Israel and its security establishment but also by Jewish institutions and potential targets (synagogues, schools, representative personalities, etc.) around the world.

## ABOUT THE ICT

Founded in 1996, the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) is one of the leading academic institutes for counter-terrorism in the world, facilitating international cooperation in the global struggle against terrorism.

ICT is an independent think tank providing expertise in terrorism, counter-terrorism, homeland security, threat vulnerability and risk assessment, intelligence analysis and national security and defense policy.

ICT is a non-profit organization located at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya, Israel which relies exclusively on private donations and revenue from events, projects and programs.