

## Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri Strives to Direct Jihad Against the State of Israel



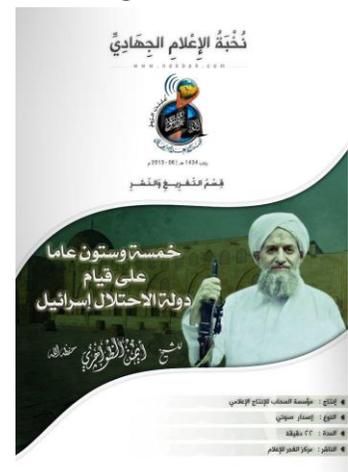
ICT  
International Institute  
for Counter-Terrorism

International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT)

Additional ICT resources are available on ICT's website: [www.ict.org.il](http://www.ict.org.il)

During the past year and a half, Al-Qaeda leader Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri has mentioned the State of Israel with increasing frequency. This trend reflects his desire to place Palestine at the center of jihadist discourse, and to direct jihadist efforts against Israeli territory. The latest instance of this occurred on June 6, 2013, when the Al-Sahab jihadist media institution published a new video clip by the Al-Qaeda leader titled, “65 Years of Existence for the Occupying State of Israel”. The date of publication was apparently chosen to coincide with commemoration of the nakba [tragedy], as the Palestinians call the establishment of the State of Israel, which falls on May 15.

Al-Zawahiri addressed this video clip to the Muslim Nation as a whole. He began his diatribe by insisting that all of Palestine must be liberated through iihad alone. He was careful to stipulate that the obligation to participate in jihad against the State if Israel is an individual obligation under Islamic law [fard ayn], incumbent on each and every Muslim, regardless of whether or not he is a Palestinian. After Palestine’s liberation, he added, the Muslims must establish an Islamic theocracy whose constitution is shari’a [Islamic law] on all of Palestinian territory.<sup>1</sup> In order to attain this goal, he said, Muslims must mass in Syrian territory, and turn Syria into a launching pad for jihadist incursions into Israel.



It should be noted that al-Zawahiri had raised this idea as early as September 1, 2012, when he proposed a plan for liberating Palestine that included Syria as the gateway through which the mujahideen would bring Palestine back into the Muslim fold. Again on October 24, 2012, al-Zawahiri stated that Syria and Egypt were the gateways to the liberation of Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Al-Zawahiri ascribes Syrian territory strategic importance for several reasons, which he elucidated in this most recent video clip. (1) The liberation of Palestine is contingent on reaching the arena of jihad in Syria. In other words, Syria is the key to the conquest of Palestine. (2) Renewal of the Islamic caliphate is contingent on the Muslims’ arrival in Syria. (3) Participation in the jihad in Syria is necessary to the overthrow of the corrupt secular

<sup>1</sup> Al-Zawahiri spoke in a similar vein on February 29, 2012, when he urged the new regime in Egypt to cut its ties with Israel, adding that jihad was the only possible means of liberating all of Palestine.

Alawite regime. (4) Syria is an additional battlefield against the US. (5) The fighting in Syria is also a way to thwart the expansionist aspirations of Shi'ite Iran.

At the same time, al-Zawahiri warned that the US and its allies would try to establish a new government in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime – a government that will be loyal to the West, fastidious about maintaining the security of the border with Israel, adamant in preventing the implementation of shari'a in Syria, and subject to international law. He accused the US of blindly supporting the State of Israel. According to al-Zawahiri, it is the US that has funded, armed, supported and provided Israel with material, psychological and legal assistance since its establishment, abetting all of its crimes against the Muslim Nation.

Al-Zawahiri also accused several of the recently-established Arab regimes of bolstering Israel's regional and international status. For example, he noted, Tunisia's new rulers often discuss the possibility of normalizing relations with Israel, and the new Egyptian government is willing to respect Egypt's "capitulation" agreements with Israel. Moreover, the leaders of many Egyptian Islamist movements have declared that they will respect the agreements with Israel signed by Sadat and Mubarak. Even the Palestinian Fatah has betrayed its principles: It calls for formulating a peace agreement with Israel, it has agreed to relinquish a sizable portion of Palestinian territory, it has abandoned jihad as a means of liberating Palestine, and it has forsaken a large number of its people. According to al-Zawahiri, all of this is tantamount to a plain and unequivocal recognition of Israel's existence and legitimacy.

Al-Zawahiri therefore sees the Syrian arena of jihad as an opportune base of operations for jihadist activities against Israel. Once the Assad regime has been overthrown, noted al-Zawahiri, conditions will be optimal for establishing an Islamic state in Syria, which will become a magnet for the many Muslims who will participate in the jihad against Israel. Moreover, the Islamic state that will be established in Syria will easily be able to receive logistical, financial and military assistance from the Islamic State of Iraq – Al-Qaeda's offshoot in Iraq. Consequently, al-Zawahiri urged the mujahideen in Syria to close ranks and refuse to lay down their arms until Syria had become an Islamic theocracy that would help re-instate the caliphate, institute justice, rout corruption, and liberate all of Palestine.

It is important to note that Al-Qaeda does not have a monopoly on the realization that conditions in Syria are ripe for establishing a new theater of jihad against Israel. In fact, this

reality is crystal clear to Hezbollah and the Iranians, no less than to Bashar al-Assad. Each of them, for idiosyncratic reasons, has begun to test the possibility of striking at Israel from within Syrian territory – either by mouthing slogans and employing psychological warfare or, in some cases, by shooting the odd round in retaliation for Israel’s actions.<sup>2</sup> In either case, the tranquility that the Golan Heights border has known for the past several decades is beginning the metamorphosis into a theater of conflict characteristic of the rival terrorist elements Hezbollah, on one hand, and global jihad, on the other. Both of these actors are trying and will continue to try to establish effective, operable military infrastructure along this border.

---

<sup>2</sup> For example, in late March 2013, three mortars were fired from Syria at the southern Golan Heights, and shots were fired that hit an Israel Defense Forces jeep: <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/1.1974819> (Hebrew). Also, in May 2013, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah stated his intention of helping the Syrian regime recapture the Golan Heights: <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Nasrallah-Hezbollah-will-help-Syria-recapture-Golan-312689> (English).