

**ANSAR BAYT AL-MAQDIS:
THE SINAI-BASED GROUP THAT “INTRODUCES” ITSELF
INTO THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT**

By Claude Moniquet and Lhoussain Azergui

While the Israeli government accuses Hamas of being directly responsible for the recent murder of three teens, in the West Bank, the Sinai-based group **Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis** claimed responsibility on Tuesday for the triple murder. In the same statement, the organisation took credit for rocket attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip **and pledged allegiance to “Caliph” Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.**

If the origin of the claims seems credible, there is, at this stage, no proof that **Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis** was indeed behind the kidnapping and killings of Naftali Frenkel, Gilad Shaar and Eyal Yifrach. It may well be that the group is “simply” being opportunistic by claiming a terror act widely advertised with the aim of acquiring an importance it did not have so far. **Yet, it is worth mentioning that, for the past years, Sunni Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups attempted to settle in Lebanon, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip** to expand their influence across the Muslim world by “capitalizing” on the Palestinian cause, which remains a very powerful source of support and sympathy in the Middle East.

In any case, only the provision of information and documents belonging to the killers could confirm the claim for the triple murder case.

1) Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis

The terror group **Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis** (ABM, “*Supporters of the Holy House*”) also known as **Ansar Jerusalem** (“*Supporters of Jerusalem*”), made itself known after the 2011 Arab Spring in Egypt and it mostly operates in the Sinai region. The group developed its terror activities after Mohammed Morsi’s ouster by the military in July 2013.

Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis officially announced its formation on June 25, 2012 in a video record in which its members claimed responsibility for an **attack against a gas pipeline in Sinai**. The group’s members explained that this attack was made in retaliation to the sale of natural gas to Israel. In a second video, posted in August 2012, the group claimed responsibility for **rocket attacks on the Israeli city of Eliat**, which will be targeted several times afterwards. In September 2012, the group claimed responsibility for the **kidnapping and killing of a “Mossad spy”** in the Sinai region, as well as for the **murder of 16 Egyptian border guards** during an operation in the same region.

It should be noted that, since its creation, **the group also operated on the Israeli territory**. On September 21, 2012, an attack left one soldier dead in Tsahal. The Israeli and Egyptian regimes (the Muslim Brotherhood first, and then the army) prove to be, since the beginning, “legitimate targets” for ABM.

Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis is a terror group founded by Hamas dissidents, who were opposing the truce between Hamas and Israel and favouring the continuation of armed resistance against the Jewish State. To settle in the Sinai region, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis received support from the Unity and Jihad Group (Attawhid wal jihad). This latter merged with the newly founded group that later on, brought together 7 jihadist groups. There is an estimated 2 000 Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis members currently operating in the Sinai region.

Among the **high-profile attacks perpetrated by the group against the Egyptian regime**, we will particularly emphasise:

- The assassination attempt of **Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim Mustapha**, in September 2013.
- An attack against a **military intelligence headquarters in Ismailia**, in October 2013.
- The assassination of **Security Officer Mohamed Mabrouk**, on November 17, 2013.
- An attack against a **police station in Beni Suef**, on January 23, 2014 (5 killed).
- Several **bomb attacks against police infrastructures in Cairo and its surroundings**, on January 2014 (8 killed and some 80 wounded).

ABM also claimed responsibility for an attack against a tourist bus in Taba on February 16, 2014, which left 3 Korean nationals and their Egyptian driver dead.

According to several testimonies and investigation documents, ABM would mainly recruit within the Bedouin community in the Sinai region, while other Egyptian nationals and foreigners are also said to have joined the organisation.

2) ABM's relationship with Hamas and Sunni terrorist organisations

Hamas has distanced itself from Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis. In January 2014, the spokesman of Hamas movement has denied any links with Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis, saying that the group "is not Palestinian" and also declared his support to the Egyptian army.

Considered to be ideologically close to al-Qaeda, in May this year ABM denied any organizational link with this movement as well as with the Muslim Brotherhood, saying, however, that it shares the same ideology that al-Qaeda.

It appeared that ABM is linked to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and actively implicated in recruiting of new members for ISIL. In January 2014, Ansar Bait Al-Maqdis in official statement officially pledged allegiance to ISIL and personally to its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Tuesday, July 1, ABM announced it was changing its name to Jamaat Ansar al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi Bayt Al Maqdis, ("The group of Partisans of Islamic state of Bayt Al Maqdis").

One also should recall that on April 9, the U.S. State Department designated ABM as a "foreign terrorist organization" (FTO, Foreign Terrorist Organization) **likely be a far-right group or a radical anti-government group.**