

ISIS Targets the Temple Mount



The Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Photo: Andrew Shiva via Wikimedia Commons.

JNS.org - The Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement — which has been outlawed by Israel — and a small group of ISIS supporters among Israeli Arabs, are linked by a common idea: the concept of a worldwide Islamic caliphate.

The unexpected combination of supporters of these two rival movements, which espouse very different ways of achieving that goal, has in recent years been playing out in the Jabarin neighborhood of Umm al-Fahm, in northern Israel.

In the past few months, the two movements' common ground has been stretched to the most volatile place in Israel — the Temple Mount. This can be seen by the activities of three terrorist cells.

The first carried out a shocking terrorist attack inside the Temple Mount compound last July. Its members were raised on the wild fabrications of the Northern Branch and the Muslim Brotherhood. The other two cells are new on the scene, but no less dangerous: two cells of ISIS supporters that were finally exposed last September and this past February, after having stayed off the media's radar.

The blurry line that separates supporters of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement from ISIS supporters turns out to be what ties them together.

Leader of the Northern Branch, Sheikh Raed Salah, envisions Jerusalem as the capital of an international Muslim caliphate. The "Al-Aqsa is in danger" narrative, with which Salah is closely identified, is only one stairway to that particular heaven.

The Islamic State and its supporters, on the other hand, have never limited or defined the borders of the future caliphate, or named a capital for it. After their fall in Syria and Iraq, the issues of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa are, for them, a new horizon — or at least a potential one.

The way that the Northern Branch sees it, the story about Al-Aqsa being in danger is a tool to recruit the masses, and Al-Aqsa itself is a place that must be “redeemed from the Jewish desecration” and “freed from its bonds.” That is its ethos.

For the small cluster of Arab Israeli supporters of the Islamic State, Al-Aqsa is everything that the Northern Branch says it is, and more: It is a tool that ISIS can use to spread and promote the idea of an Islamic State, and active war against Jews and Christians — “the new heretics and Crusaders.”

For 50 years, threats to the Temple Mount were mainly seen as coming from Jewish radicals: underground movements and zealots who wanted to hasten the redemption, and planned — or even tried — to blow up the Mount. Security officials today believe the Jewish front to be relatively quiet. The more Jews who visit the Temple Mount and the more visiting conditions for Jews improve, the more that potential Jewish extremists are starting to realize that reverting to the fragile situation on the Temple Mount will lead to the site once again being closed off to Jews. Surprisingly, the Jewish side has a lot to lose.

But now, for the first time since the 1967 Six-Day War, the opposite scenario — Muslim threats and attacks to the area — is gaining traction. Last July, three residents of the Ayin Ibrahim neighborhood of Umm al-Fahm murdered two Israeli Border Police on guard duty at the Temple Mount. It was an attack that was keenly felt. Raed Salah took part in the funerals of the terrorists who were killed while carrying out the attack, and left no doubt about their ideological alignment. That attack shook the relations between Israel, Jordan, the Palestinians and many Arab Israelis. It took about two weeks to quell the flames.

Now, like with the waves of terrorist stabbings and car-rammings, there are some who are trying to carry out copycat Temple Mount attacks. Twice in five months, the Shin Bet security agency successfully thwarted shooting attacks planned along the lines of last summer’s lethal incident. As in July 2017, each of the cells included three young men from Umm al-Fahm, some of whom belonged to the Jabarin clan. But in contrast to last July, these terrorists were ISIS supporters. In both cases, the terrorists were raised on the stories of the Northern Movement, and only later became even more radicalized and came to embrace ISIS.

Expressions of support for the Islamic State in Umm al-Fahm are nothing new. In

addition to the two cells that wanted to carry out an attack on the Mount, last August two brothers from Umm al-Fahm — who also supported ISIS — were arrested. Two years ago, a family from Umm al-Fahm learned that one of its sons who had joined the Islamic State in Syria had been killed there. And two other youths from Umm al-Fahm who flew to Turkey around that time to join the Islamic State in Syria were arrested and put in prison.

But the new development that has security officials most worried isn't the voices of support for ISIS in Umm al-Fahm, but rather Islamic State supporters in Israel setting their sights on the Temple Mount as a potential terrorist target.

It's not hard to picture what would happen if two ISIS cells from Jabarin, linked by family ties, were to execute an attack. In the Middle East, the Temple Mount is the ultimate powder keg. Any fire that breaks out there spreads quickly and is very difficult to put out. In previous incidents, the spinners of the "Al-Aqsa is in danger" yarn found a way to foist responsibility for the attacks onto Israel, as the entity that "rules over Islamic holy sites."

In the recent attempted attacks, the Shin Bet's precise intelligence allowed it to thwart two shootings, but a huge warning light has started flashing. Some 50 years after the reunification of Jerusalem, the Temple Mount is now a target for jihadi terrorism.

According to an indictment served last week, any such attack would be aiming at security forces and "new Crusaders," i.e. Christians and Jews. One count in the indictment reveals a plan to murder "a great number of heretics [non-Muslim civilians] in a suicide bombing." A terrorist named Mohammed Jabarin was to have worn the explosives belt and detonated it. The plan also called for another terrorist, a minor whose name is not allowed to be published, to fire guns until he was killed.

The outline of the planned attack is similar to the bloody combined suicide attacks we saw in Iraq, which would often leave dozens dead. Other plans the two terrorists considered — attacking worshippers at a Tel Aviv synagogue or Christians during Christmastime — highlight the principle motivation: to slaughter "heretics."

Throughout the world, the most immediate danger from ISIS attacks comes from the "returned" youths who fought for ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and are now back in

their countries in Europe, Turkey, Tunisia — and even Israel. They are back home after the fall of ISIS, brimming with jihadi ideology and motivated to continue attacking heretics.

In Israel, the Temple Mount could be the next in line. The fact that two ISIS cells were planning suicide and shooting attacks on the Mount, which were fortunately stopped in time, is not good news. Security officials are assuming that they won't be the last to try.

The opinions presented by Algemeiner bloggers are solely theirs and do not represent those of The Algemeiner, its publishers or editors. If you would like to share your views with a blog post on The Algemeiner, please be in touch through our Contact page.

Source: <https://www.algemeiner.com/2018/03/13/isis-targets-the-temple-mount/>

[Disclaimer]