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A network of former Fatah operatives in the Gaza Strip (Al-Ahrar) supported by Hamas announced the establishment of a military wing. Flags of the US and Israel were set on fire during the announcement ceremonies, while a representative of the Turkish organization IHH congratulated the participants by a video call.



Ceremony announcing the establishment of the military wing of Al-Ahrar, a network supported by Hamas (Panet website, July 7, 2010)



An IHH representative making a congratulatory video address during one of the establishment ceremonies of the military wing (Panet website, July 7, 2010)

Overview

1. **A network of former Fatah operatives referring to themselves as the Palestinian Movement of Al-Ahrar (“The Free”) has recently announced the establishment of its military wing.** Al-Ahrar is a network founded shortly after the Hamas military coup (June 2007) by former Fatah operatives. They are headed by Khaled Abu Hilal, the former spokesman of the Hamas-led PA government established following the Legislative Council election.

2. **The network, which does not recognize Abu Mazen as a leader, espouses armed struggle as a way to end the “Israeli occupation” of Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip. It was supported by Hamas from its inception—in our assessment, this was part of the process of taking over Fatah as well as internal Palestinian power struggles.** Its political activity is reported mostly on Hamas-affiliated media (such as the newspaper Felesteen); it is also our belief that its military activity is supported and directed by Hamas.

The well-publicized establishment of the Al-Ahrar military wing

3. On July 7, 2010, the network celebrated its third anniversary by holding ceremonies and parades in the Gaza Strip. The main event of those activities was the **announcement on the establishment of the movement’s military wing, called Al-Ansar Battalions.** The announcement was accompanied by a military ceremony which was attended by several dozen operatives armed with Kalashnikov rifles, said to be soldiers belonging to one of the “companies of the battalions” (an exaggeration frequently observed during such activities). **In the ceremony, flags of Turkey were raised and flags of Israel and the US were stomped or set on fire** (Hamas itself has been avoiding such direct anti-Western activities lately; however, it does not prevent its proxies from engaging in them).



The military ceremony announcing the establishment of Al-Ansar Battalions, the military wing of Al-Ahrar (Panet, July 7, 2010)



Israeli flag stomped and set on fire during the military ceremony of the Al-Ansar Battalions (Panet and Safa websites, July 7, 2010)



Flags of Israel and the US set on fire during the military ceremony of the Al-Ansar Battalions (Panet and Safa websites, July 7, 2010)

4. A parade held at the same time as the military ceremony was assisted by the Hamas administration police in the Gaza Strip. Another celebration was held at the Rashad al-Shawa Center in Gaza City (the major convention center in the Gaza Strip). It was attended by **top Hamas administration officials in the Gaza Strip, including Interior Minister Fathi Hamad and Legislative Council Deputy Speaker Ahmed Bahar.**



The ceremony at the Rashad al-Shawa Center (Panet, July 7, 2010)

5. Speaking during the ceremony, Al-Ahrar spokesman **Mustafa al-Qishawi** presented the movement's program for the next year, which included merging its social and military activities. According to Al-Qishawi, **the Al-Ansar Battalions**, the movement's military wing, **will begin operating during the fourth year** (Al-Resala, July 7, 2010). **Al-Ahrar leader Khaled Abu Hilal said that its military wing was "ready to join the ranks of resistance and fight against the occupation"** (Felesteen, July 8, 2010).

6. Hamas administration representatives also spoke during the ceremony. **Legislative Council Deputy Speaker Ahmed Bahar** said the following: "The actions of the Al-Ahrar movement since its establishment prove that it is a **true continuation of the movements of resistance** in its adherence to rights, fundamental principles, and defense of the resistance" (Hamas' Felesteen, July 8, 2010).

7. **It is our assessment that, once its policy of terrorist attacks allows it, Hamas may employ military operatives belonging to the Al-Ahrar network as "subcontractors for terrorist attacks", as it formerly did with operatives of other similar terrorist networks.**



Top Hamas administration officials taking part in the ceremony. Left: Legislative Council Deputy Speaker Ahmed Bahar; right: Fathi Hamad, the Hamas administration interior minister in the Gaza Strip (Panet and Safa websites, July 7).

Praise for Turkey and the IHH organization

8. **Flags of Turkey were raised** during the military ceremony. **A representative of the Turkish organization IHH also made a video address** with flags of Turkey and the IHH visible in the background.



Left: An IHH representative making a congratulatory video address during one of the military wing establishment ceremonies; right: a flag of Turkey raised during the military ceremony (Panet and Sefa websites, July 7, 2010)