



February 2, 2015

**Hamas and the other terrorist organizations based in Gaza are rehabilitating the military capabilities damaged in Operation Protective Edge through extensive recruitment, the establishment of military units and intensive military training.**



Gazan youths, some in uniform, learn how to operate weapons at one of the training camps in the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of PALINFO, January 21, 2015).

## Overview

1. Hamas, the other terrorist organizations and the security forces in the Gaza Strip have made efforts in the past months **to restore military capabilities damaged during Operation Protective Edge**. To that end Hamas has allotted considerable funds, manpower and equipment, despite the lack of resources in the Gaza Strip. **The military buildup is particularly blatant in view of the continuing delays in the civilian reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. It clearly shows that Hamas' priority is the rehabilitation of its military-terrorist capabilities at the expense of civilian needs.** Hamas and terrorist organizations are also making an effort **to preserve and reinforce public support** for their military-terrorist wings and the so-called "armed resistance" by focusing on the battle for the hearts and minds of young Gazans.

2. That effort includes the following:

1) **Recruiting and training adolescents:** The military training camps opened by the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, according to Hamas, **trained more than 17,000 adolescents between the ages of 15 and 17.**<sup>1</sup> They received **basic and advanced military training** (including the abduction of IDF soldiers and exiting tunnels) **and religious indoctrination** (See Appendix A). Beyond filling the ranks thinned out by Operation Protective Edge, recruiting adolescents **is aimed to increase support for Hamas within the population** because of the extreme distress prevalent in the Gaza Strip.

2) **Establishing new military frameworks:** Hamas has begun constructing its so-called "popular army." On November 7, 2014, it presented **the first battalion, claiming it had 2,500 operatives.** The "popular army" is supposed to serve as an auxiliary force for the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades in a future confrontation with Israel. Hamas will probably establish another "popular army" battalion. **The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) have also allegedly established new military frameworks, claiming they are of battalion strength** (See Appendix C).

3) **Intensive training exercises carried out within Hamas and the other terrorist organizations:** The training stresses storming and taking control of **IDF posts near the Gaza Strip border**, and abducting IDF soldiers. That is because according to Hamas' perception, that was the modus operandi that **brought achievements during Operation Protective Edge**, causing Israel the greatest number of losses. That is also a clear indication of **the importance the terrorist organizations give to abducting an Israeli soldier or the body of an Israeli soldier to be used as a bargaining chip for the release of terrorists imprisoned in Israel.**

4) **Military training for the Gazan security forces:** The Hamas-controlled national security forces finished two officers' training courses In December 2014. There were 1,000 members in one course and 160 in the other. At one exercise, held in an Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades training facility, **the graduates**

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<sup>1</sup> An examination of the names of Gazan fatalities in Operation Protective Edge indicated adolescents who served in the military-terrorist wings of the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip. The extensive recruitment of young men and the intention to use them as auxiliary forces for the regular military-terrorist units is **liable to increase the number of those killed and wounded in future confrontations between the terrorist organizations and the IDF, serving Hamas as propaganda material to use against Israel.**

**simulated taking over an IDF post.**<sup>2</sup> On November 30, 2014, graduation exercises were held for 85 participants in a course for personal security; the graduates demonstrated their military skills (See Appendix B). The internal security forces are considered by Hamas as an important tool **in maintaining control over the Gaza Strip and they cooperate closely with the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military-terrorist wing.**



Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operatives drag an Israeli soldier from an IDF post during a simulation exercise (Paltimes.net, December 27, 2014).



Left: A young Gazan boy practices shooting from the so-called "Gilad Shalit tunnel" (Facebook page of Hamas' Pioneers of Liberation camps, January 24, 2015). Right: Operatives practice exiting a tunnel (Facebook page of PALINFO, January 21, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> For further information see the December 29, 2014 bulletin "[Hamas' Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades and National Security Forces Exercises Simulate Takeover of IDF Posts near Gaza Strip and Abduction of Soldiers.](#)"

3. Hamas, its internal security forces and the other terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip **have publicly announced their recruiting and training efforts**, as well as the establishment of new military frameworks. Their main objective is **to raise the morale of the Gazan population**, which is low because of the delays in civilian reconstruction. Another objective is **to send a deterrent message to Israel**, indicating that **its military capabilities are not only being rehabilitated but expanded** as well.

**4. Hamas' giving priority to its military buildup at the expense of the needs of the civilian population is familiar from the aftermath of Operation Cast Lead.**

For example, at the time, when the civilian population in the Gaza Strip needed cement to rebuild their houses, Hamas used it to reconstruct its damaged military infrastructure.<sup>3</sup> On November 12, 2009, **Khaled Mashaal**, head of Hamas' political bureau, announced that most of Hamas' efforts would be invested in military reconstruction. He said, "Outwardly the visible picture is talks about reconciliation...and construction; however, the hidden picture is that **most of the money and effort is invested in the resistance and military preparations.**"<sup>4</sup>

**Giving priority to the military buildup over critical civilian needs is, in ITIC assessment, a function of the Hamas leadership's strategic decision, again evident after Operation Protective Edge.**

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<sup>3</sup> For further information see the August 3, 2014 bulletin "[Prioritization of Hamas' Military Buildup vs. the Gaza Strip's Civilian Needs: Hamas' genuine strategic priorities according to Khaled Mashaal, about a year after Operation Cast Lead.](#)"

<sup>4</sup> For further information see the August 11, 2014 bulletin "[After Operation Cast Lead Hamas Used Cement Delivered to the Gaza Strip to Rebuild and Upgrade Its Military-Terrorist Infrastructure at the Expense of Civilian Needs.](#)"

## Appendix A

### Training Camps for Adolescents

1. On January 20, 2015, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades announced it was planning to recruit and train young men in **camps they would open throughout the Gaza Strip**. The training courses, whose official title would be Pioneers of Liberation, would last for a week and **were intended for youths between the ages of 15 and 21**. They would undergo basic military training, have religious instruction and take first aid courses; registration would be possible at the neighborhood mosques (Qassam.ps, January 12, 2015). **The training camps were an addition to the ongoing military training**, which is part of the high school curriculum in the Gaza Strip.



Left: Ismail Haniya visits an enlistment site for the training camps (Facebook page of PALINFO, January 20, 2015). Right: The Hamas announcement about registration for the training camps (Qassam.ps, January 11, 2015).

2. At the end of January 2015 the training program for adolescents went into effect, reportedly generating considerable interest. For a week, every afternoon **more than 17,000 young people** [according to Hamas] **received basic military training for what Hamas called "preparation for the next campaign of liberation."** They were trained by Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operatives in the basic use of weapons (including firing them), putting out fires and giving first aid. They also received Hamas' religious indoctrination (Facebook page of the Pioneers of Liberation camps, January 20, 2015). **Some of the youths apparently underwent more advanced military training**. There are pictures documenting a variety of military activities of the sort

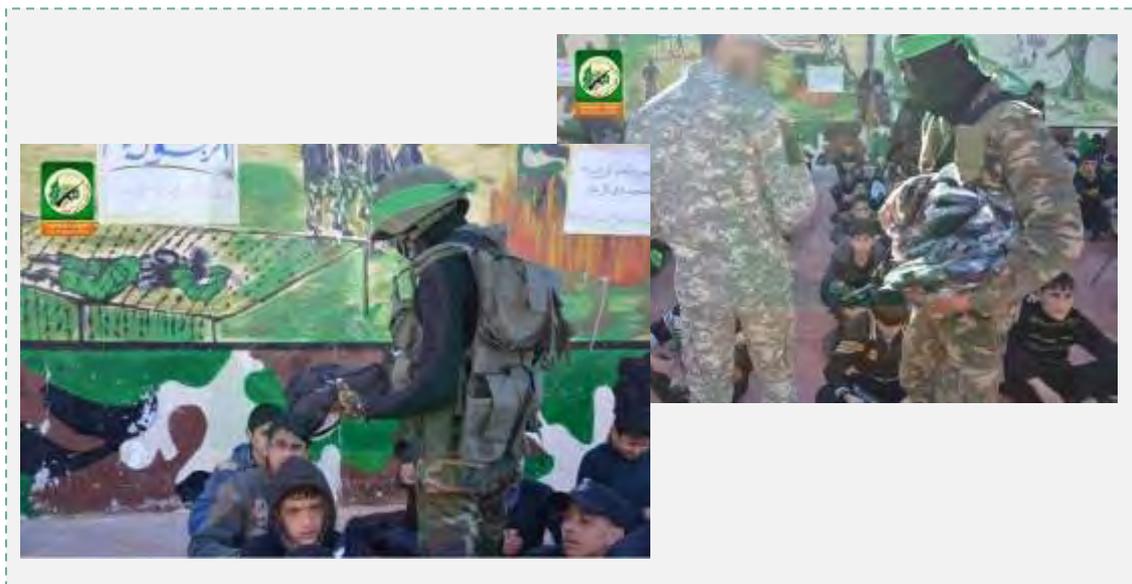
carried out by Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades terrorist operatives during Operation Protective Edge, such as abducting IDF soldiers and exiting tunnels.



Left: A schedule for the northern Gaza Strip for bus rides to the various camps. The right-hand column lists the camps. Right: The Pioneers of Liberation camps' logo (Facebook page of the Pioneers of Liberation camps, January 20, 2015).

3. The training camps were widely covered by the Hamas media and senior organization members often visited them. On January 29, 2015, graduation exercises were held throughout the Gaza Strip. The main ceremonies were in Gaza City and Khan Yunis, and were attended by Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades commanders and senior Hamas figures such as **Ismail Haniya** (Al-Aqsa TV, January 29, 2015). At the ceremony in Khan Yunis, senior Hamas figure **Mahmoud al-Zahar** claimed that **Hamas and the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades would continue to support the training camps with money and weapons**. He claimed that in the near future, in the next campaign against Israel the youths would stand behind rockets that would be dispatched to all parts of "Palestine" (Al-Aqsa TV, the website of the Hamas ministry of the interior, Qassam.ps, January 29, 2015).

### Pictures from the Training Camps



Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades terrorist operatives distribute uniforms to the youths at a camp in the central Gaza Strip (Facebook page of the Pioneers of Liberation camps, January 22, 2015).



The youths learn how to shoot rifles (Facebook page of PALINFO, January 21 and 22, 2015)



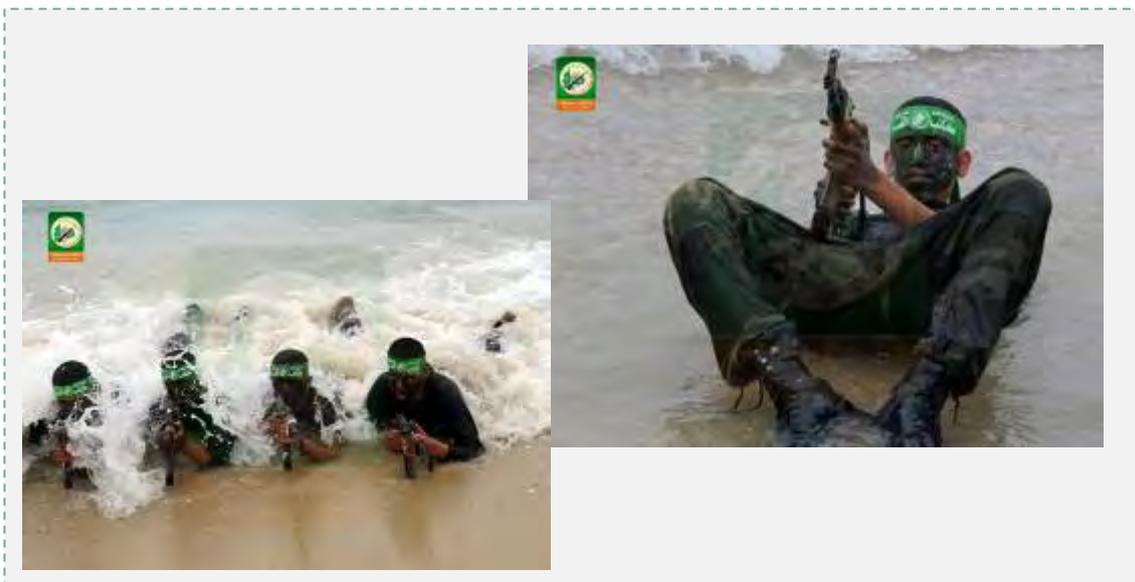
The youths learn how to launch RPGs (Facebook page of PALINFO, January 21 and 22, 2015).



Left: A young Gazan boy practices shooting from the so-called "Gilad Shalit tunnel" (Facebook page of Hamas' Pioneers of Liberation camps, January 24, 2015). Right: Practicing exiting a tunnel (Facebook page of PALINFO, January 21, 2015).



Simulation of the abduction of an IDF soldier (Facebook page of the Pioneers of Liberation camps, January 24, 2015)



The youths undergo so-called "naval training," apparently a display to glorify the actions of Hamas' naval commandos in Operation Protective Edge (Facebook page of the Pioneers of Liberation camps, January 26, 2015).



Models of R-160 rockets ("Destination Haifa") displayed at one of the camps in the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of PALINFO, January 25, 2015).

## Appendix B

### Military Training for the Internal Security Forces and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine

#### Graduation Exercises for the Course for Personal Security

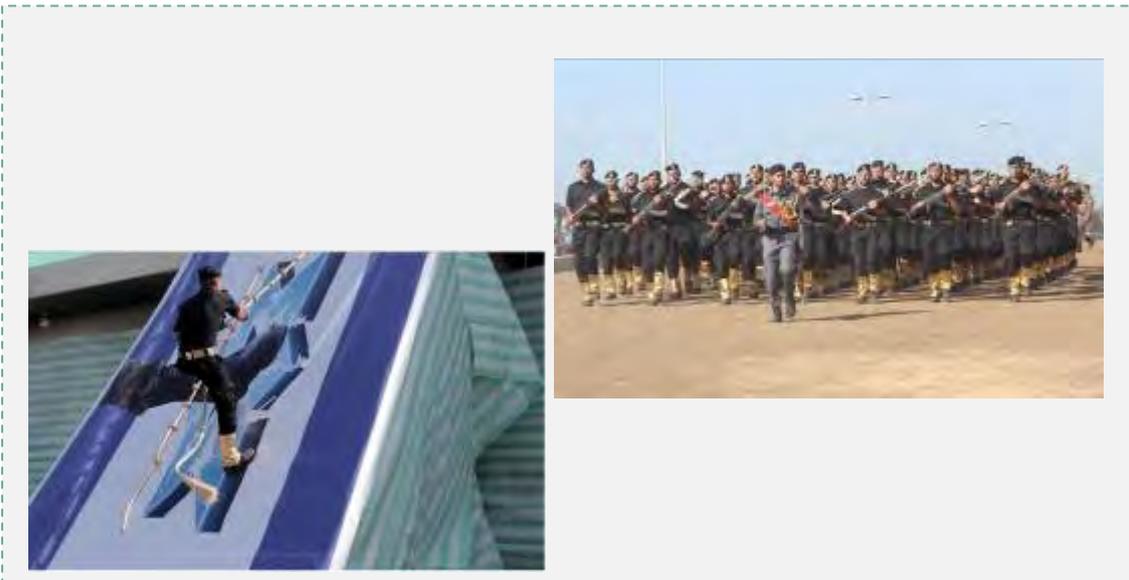
1. On **November 30, 2014**, graduation exercises were held for the fifth course of personal security, the courses named for Hamas terrorist operatives killed in Operation Protective Edge. **Eighty-five operatives** were enrolled. The graduation ceremony was attended by senior figures of Hamas and of the interior ministry, and senior commanders of Hamas' security forces. The 85 graduates put on a display of military exercises to demonstrate their military skills (Websites of the Palestinian ministry of the interior and PALDF, November 30, 2014).



The graduates demonstrate their military skills (PALDF, November 30, 2014).

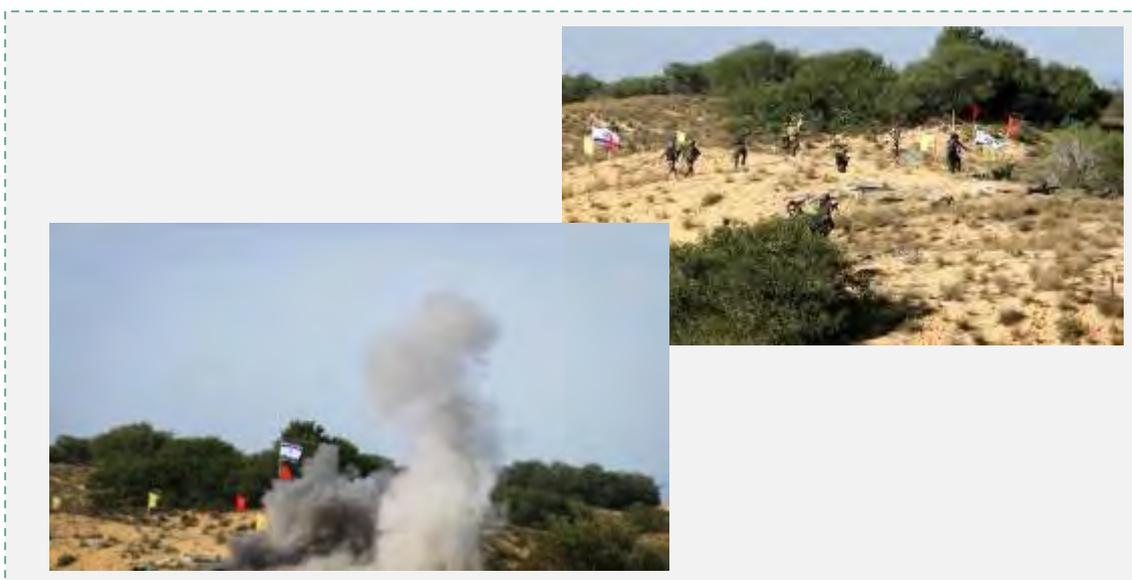
#### Graduation of the National Security Forces' Course

2. On **December 4, 2014**, an officers' training course of **1,000 participants** ended, sponsored by the ministry of the interior and the Hamas-controlled national security forces in the Gaza Strip. The graduation exercises were held in the port of Gaza and were attended by senior figures of the ministry of the interior and the national security forces (Website of the ministry of the interior in the Gaza Strip, December 4, 2014).



Left: An officer climbs up an Israeli flag. Right: Officers on parade at the port of Gaza (Website of the Palestinian ministry of the interior, December 4, 2014).

3. On **December 23, 2014**, graduation exercises were held for a national security force officers' training course called the Martyrs of Operation Protective Edge. The course was attended by **160 national security force operatives**. The graduates held military exercises, attended by senior Hamas figures, at an **Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades training facility in the southern Gaza Strip**. At the ceremony **Hussein Abu Ghadhra**, the commander of the internal security forces in the Gaza Strip, briefed them on the final exercise. He said they were going to simulate the **takeover of an Israeli military post using mortar and light arms fire**, as well as IEDs (Website of the ministry of the interior in the Gaza Strip, December 24, 2014; Facebook page of PALINFO, December 23, 2014).



National security force operatives complete the simulation of taking over an IDF post. An Israeli flag flies over the post; there is another on the fence at the right, and IEDs are detonated (Facebook page of PALINFO, December 23, 2014).

## Graduation of DFLP Refresher Course

4. On **January 29, 2015**, a refresher course for military-terrorist operatives of the DFLP ended. The course was held at a training site located on the ruins of an Israeli settlement in the southern Gaza Strip. It was called the Fighters' Training Course and its objective was to train the operatives and refresh their military skills to prepare them for the next confrontation with Israel. The ceremony, which was attended by senior DFLP figures, featured military exercises, the simulated abduction of Israeli soldiers and live fire (Facebook page of the information bureau of the National Resistance Battalions, the DFLP's military-terrorist wing, January 31, 2015).



**Left: Simulating the abduction of an IDF soldier. Right: Graduates of the DFLP course (Facebook page of the information bureau of the National Resistance Battalions, January 31, 2015).**



**Graduates of the DFLP course demonstrate what they have learned (Facebook page of the information bureau of the National Resistance Battalions, January 31, 2015).**

## Appendix C

### Establishing New Military Frameworks

#### Hamas Presented the First Battalion of Its "Popular Army"

1. At the end of September 2014 the Hamas media reported that Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operatives had begun preparations to **establish a so-called "popular army,"** recruiting civilian volunteers of all ages. Their objective was to establish an auxiliary force for the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military-terrorist wing, for a future confrontation with Israel.

2. **On November 7, 2014,** the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military-terrorist wing, presented the **first battalion (*al-fawj al-awwal*)** of its so-called "popular army." The new battalion, called the Knights of Freedom, has, according to Hamas claims, **2,500 operatives.** Its establishment was announced during the graduation exercises of the first training course, held in the Jabaliya refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip. The ceremony included a military display, operatives on parade and a march (Website of PALDF, Palestine-info.info, Paltimes.net an, Al-Aqsa TV channel, November 7, 2014).<sup>5</sup>

3. It is not yet clear what the scale of the "popular army" will be, but completing the training of 2,500 operatives and preparations to open a second course indicate that **the force will number in the thousands and serve as an auxiliary force for the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades.** In ITIC assessment, the desire for such a force is a lesson learned from Operation Protective Edge, and its objective is to fill the ranks of the military-terrorist wing and at the same time **to increase popular support for Hamas.**

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<sup>5</sup> For further information see the November 9, 2014 bulletin "Hamas has presented the first battalion of the Popular Army, to serve as an auxiliary force for the operatives of Hamas's military wing in confrontations with Israel."



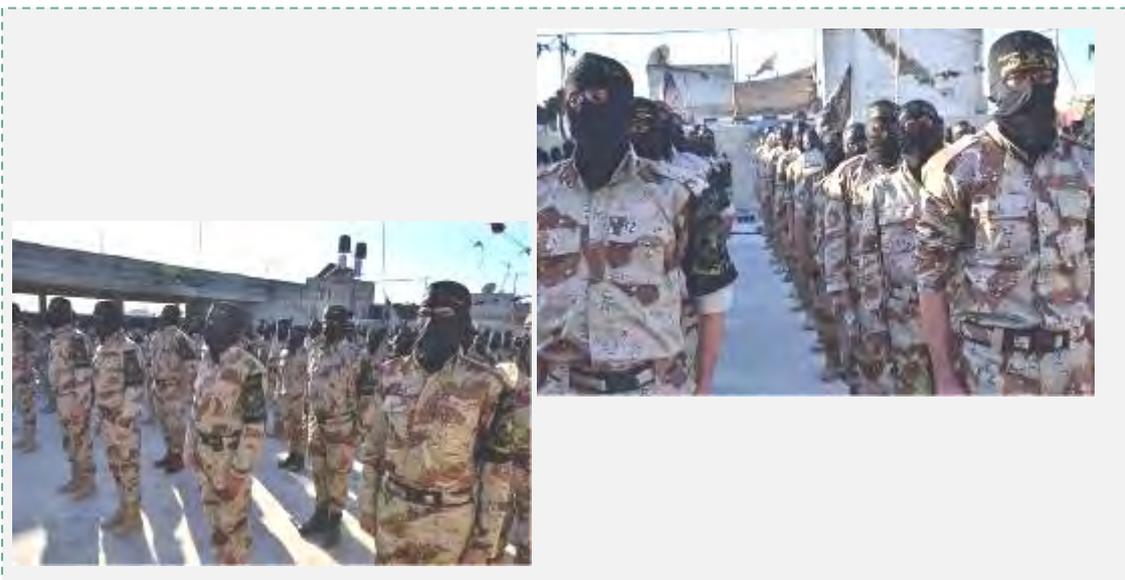
A uniformed "popular army" terrorist operative demonstrates exiting a vehicle while holding a rifle (Palestine-info.info, November 7, 2014).



Gazan "popular army" youths holding M-16 rifles and Hamas-affiliated flags graduate from the first training course (Palestine-info.info, November 7, 2014).

### New Palestinian Islamic Jihad Battalion Established

4. The information bureau of the Jerusalem Brigades, the PIJ's military-terrorist wing, announced that the organization's recruiting unit had held a festive ceremony and **military display for the establishment of its first battalion, known as the Fajr Battalion. Abu Mahmoud**, a senior military-terrorist figure, claimed that the objective was to enlist fighters, who after training would be able to join the ranks of organization's military wing (Saraya.ps, November 20, 2014).

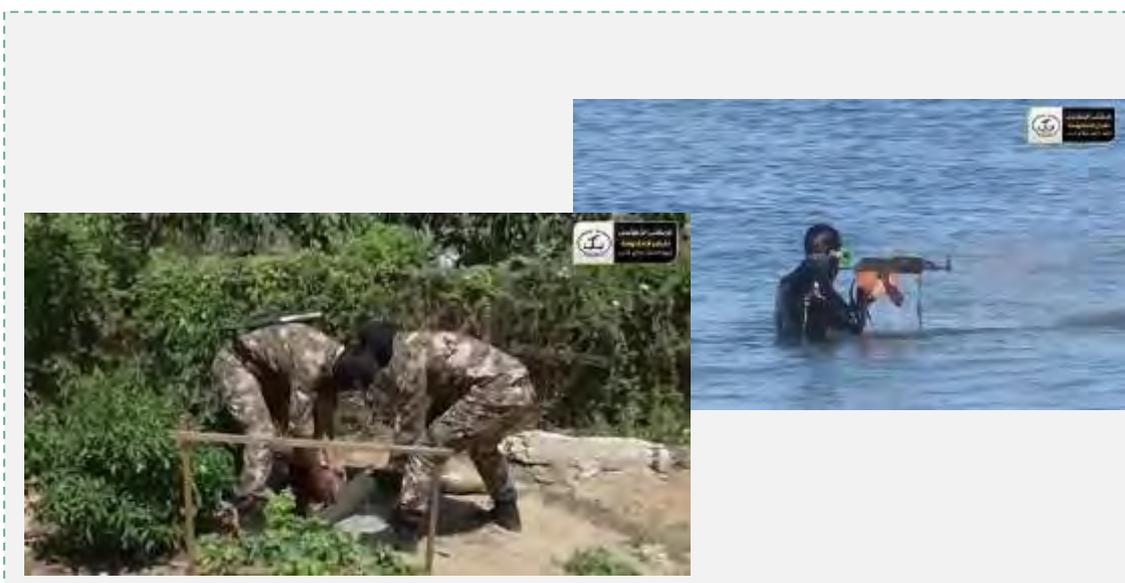


PIJ Fajr Battalion operatives on parade (Paltoday.tv, November 22, 2014).

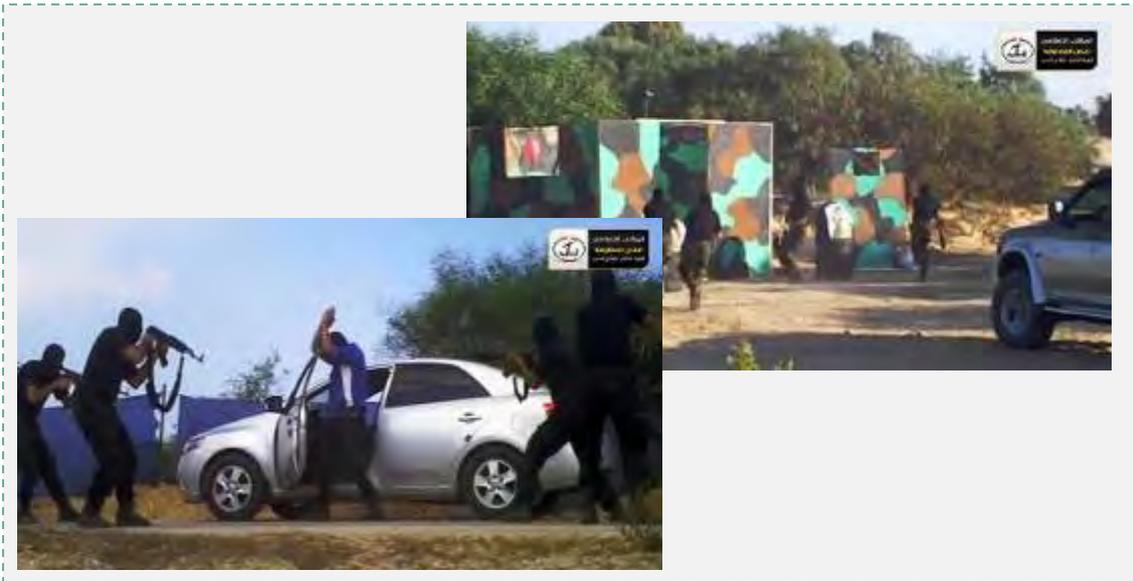
### New Popular Resistance Committees Battalion Established

5. On **December 29, 2014** the website of the Ayman al-Shashniya faction of Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) announced that new members of the organization had graduated from a training course held by the military wing. The course, which lasted for six months, was called the Knights of Heroism. According to military-terrorist wing spokesman **Abu Ataya**, the course included both offensive and defensive activities. During the graduation exercises the operatives watched a movie documenting the process of accepting and training new recruits (PRC website, December 29, 2014). The PRC's ceremony also included methods similar to those used by Hamas, including **rocket fire, the takeover of an IDF post and the use of tunnels.**

### Pictures from PRC Training



Left: Terrorist operatives fire rockets. Right: Military training (PRC website, December 29, 2014).



Left: Knights of Heroism operatives simulate the takeover of a car. Right: Operatives simulate the takeover of an Israeli post (PRC website, December 29, 2014).



Left: Terrorist operatives exit tunnels. Right: Operatives use rockets and IEDs to simulate blowing up an Israeli post (PRC website, December 29, 2014)