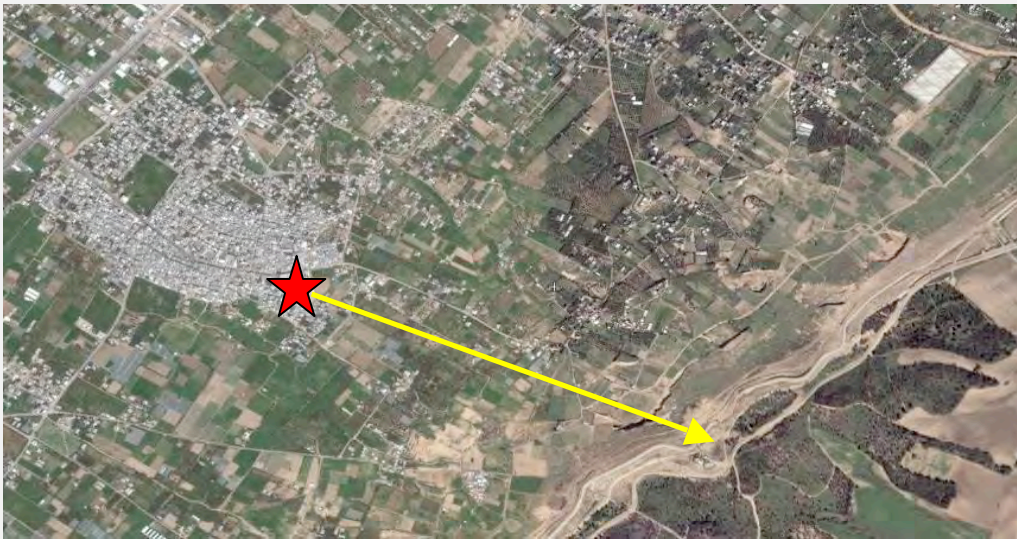




June 15, 2017

UNRWA reported the exposure of a tunnel under two of its schools in the Gaza Strip; Hamas quickly issued a denial. The military use made of UNRWA schools by terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip is well-known from past occurrences



Location of two UNRWA-run schools (indicated by the red star) in the al-Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip, where a tunnel was exposed. The school is located on the edge of the camp and is about 1.5 kilometers (less than a mile) from the Israeli border security fence (distance indicated by yellow arrow) (Wikimapia, June 12, 2017).

Overview

1. On June 9, 2017, an UNRWA spokesman reported the exposure of a tunnel running under two of its schools in the al-Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. **UNRWA** strongly condemned digging a tunnel under its schools, complaining it violated the neutral status of UN facilities. **Israel** appealed to the UN Security Council and filed an official protest against Hamas (Israeli prime minister's website, June 11, 2017; Fox News, June 12, 2017).

2. **Hamas and other terrorist organizations also used UNRWA facilities in the past**, which was exposed during Operation Protective Edge. Using UNRWA facilities for military purposes is **one aspect of the extensive use Hamas and the other terrorist organizations make of civilian facilities** (including schools, hospitals, clinics, mosques). They used them to hide weapons, position operatives and

command posts in schools, and fire rockets from locations close to civilian facilities in both Operation Cast Lead and Operation Protective. Hamas and the other terrorist organizations' basic assumption is that Israel will not attack civilian or UNRWA facilities, increasing their operatives' chances of surviving and their weapons' of remaining undamaged.

3. In principle UNRWA openly opposes the military use Hamas and the other terrorist organizations make of the schools the agency runs in the Gaza Strip.

However, its ability to stop them is limited because of the power Hamas enjoys in the Gaza Strip.¹ On the other hand, Hamas and the other terrorist organizations see many advantages in making military use of the facilities, therefore it can be assumed that Hamas will continue using UNRWA schools, despite its declarations of keeping its activities separate from those of UNRWA.

UNRWA Report about Exposing the Tunnel

4. On June 9, 2017, UN spokesman Chris Gunness **reported that UNRWA had exposed a section of tunnel under two of its schools in the al-Maghazi refugee camp.** According to the UN report (ITIC emphasis throughout):

a. "On 1 June UNRWA discovered part of a tunnel that passes under two adjacent Agency schools in Maghazi camp in the Gaza Strip, namely the Maghazi Elementary Boys A&B School and the Maghazi Preparatory Boys School.² **The schools are located on the same premises. The discovery was made during the summer vacation, at a time when the schools are empty, and in the course of work related to the construction of an extension of one of the buildings.**"

b. "Following a thorough inspection of the site, UNRWA can confirm that **the tunnel has no entry or exit points on the premises nor is it connected to the schools or other buildings in any way.**"

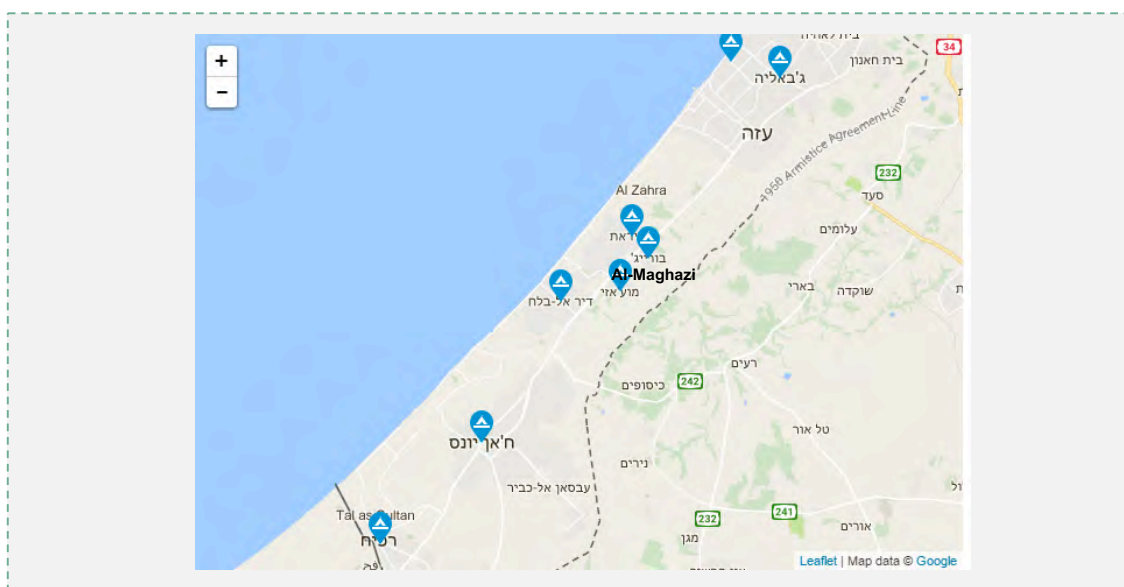
c. **"UNRWA condemns the existence of such tunnels in the strongest possible terms...**The sanctity and neutrality of UN premises must be preserved at all times...UNRWA...[has informed Hamas] the Agency intends to seal the tunnel under its premises, as an immediate priority..."

¹ Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, enjoys a position of power vis-à-vis UNRWA on the ground. That has led to a situation where Hamas wins disputes with UNRWA regarding matters of principle (such as curriculums and the UNRWA employment of Hamas activists).

² According to one media report, the tunnel was found at a depth of between two and three meters. The information did not appear in the report issued by Chris Gunness.

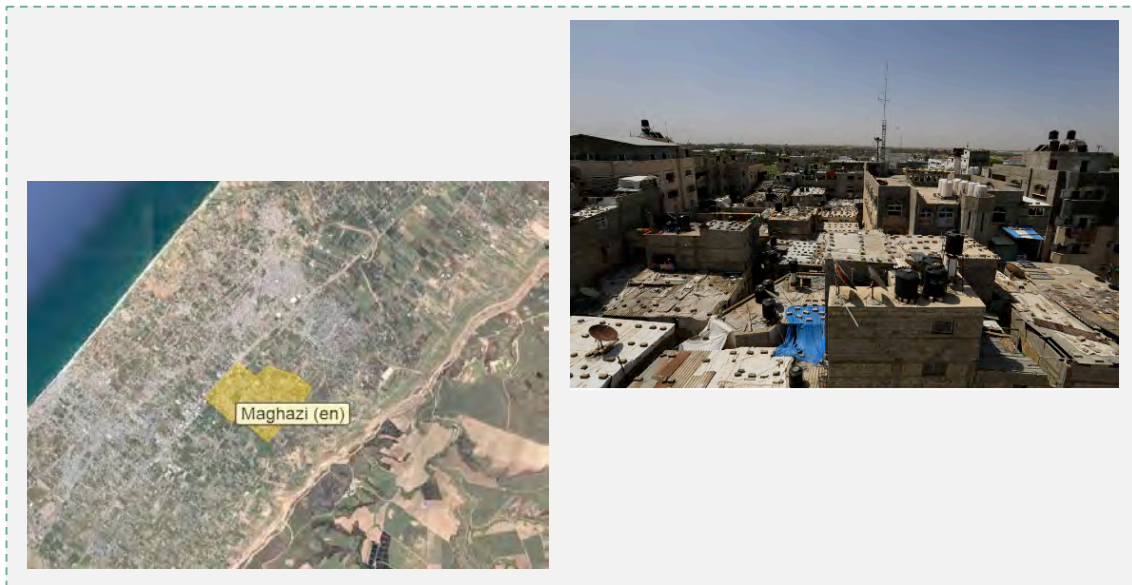
d. "The Agency again demands that all parties respect the neutrality and inviolability of United Nations premises at all times. Furthermore, we demand they desist from any activities or conduct that put beneficiaries and staff at risk..."³.

5. UNRWA operates 252 schools in the Gaza Strip, providing educational services to 240,400 children. The al-Maghazi refugee camp is one of the smaller refugee camps in the central Gaza Strip, lying to the east of Deir al-Balah, close to the Israeli border. The refugee camp itself is about two kilometers from the border security fence, while the schools where the tunnel was found are on the edge of the camp at a distance of about 1.5 kilometers (less than a mile) from the border.



Al-Maghazi, the refugee camp closest to the Israeli border (Google Maps).

³ <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/unrwa-condemns-neutrality-violation-gaza-strongest-possible-terms>



Left: The al-Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip (Wikimapia, June 12, 2017). Right: The al-Maghazi refugee camp (UNRWA website, 2016).

Hamas Responses

6. As usual, Hamas rushed to falsely deny the existence of the tunnel under the UNRWA schools, condemning UNRWA for publicizing the matter and blaming the agency for the media storm it had caused. Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum claimed Israel exploited such "claims" to "make excuses for its crimes." He claimed all the "resistance" organizations [i.e., the terrorist organizations] had declared they had no activity in schools where the tunnel was exposed and that they were careful to separate UNRWA from all "resistance" activity (Hamas website, June 9, 2017).

7. Other denials were issued as well, some of them from "popular" bodies in the Gaza Strip, which in ITIC assessment are **operated by Hamas**:

a. On June 13, 2017, "**the popular committee of refugees in the Gaza Strip**" issued a formal statement denying the existence of the tunnel.

1) According to the statement, an "initial examination" found no indication or proof of the existence of a "resistance" [i.e., terrorist] tunnel at the site. Since the al-Maghazi refugee camp was located on what was originally agricultural land, it had a number of wells and underground water pools. Apparently "natural factors had led to collapse" under the schools, or perhaps the earth had collapsed as a result of the construction work being done at the schools.

2) In addition, according to the statement, **the "resistance" [i.e., terrorist organizations] did not use UNRWA facilities for its activities and they all honored the agency's neutrality.** The "committee" asked UNRWA to act with moderation and **not rush to issue statements** before contacting local groups to deal with problems. The "committee" also blamed UNRWA for the "media storm" which Israel (i.e., "the Zionist occupation") exploited to disrupt UNRWA's work (Ma'an, June 13, 2017).

b. **Hamis' department of refugee affairs**⁴ posted statements from al-Maghazi refugee camp residents to its website, denying the UNRWA report. The site quoted **Ali Qandil, chairman of the "popular committee for refugees in camps in the central Gaza Strip,"** who claimed the earth had collapsed as a result of the construction in the school. He claimed what UNRWA called a tunnel was actually an old well (website of the Hamas department of refugee affairs, June 12, 2017).

Previous Military Use Made by Hamas and the Other Terrorist Organizations in the Gaza Strip of UNRWA Facilities

8. **Hamis'** claims that there was no tunnel and that **the "resistance" organizations do not use UNRWA facilities, are false.** The military use of UNRWA facilities by Hamas and other terrorist organizations is well known and was exposed during Operation Protective Edge. The military use of UNRWA facilities is just **one aspect of the wider exploitation** of Hamas and the other terrorist organizations of civilian facilities in general (educational institutions, hospitals and clinics, mosques).⁵

9. The following two pictures are from an Israeli video documenting **mortar shells fired by a three-man terrorist squad.** The squad situated itself **in close proximity to the central building in an UNRWA educational compound in Beit Hanoun,** in the northern Gaza Strip. The video shows the operatives setting up their firing position and firing mortar shells close to the building. After they fire the mortar shells they take cover inside the building (Israeli Air Force video published by the IDF spokesman, October 31, 2007). The following are the pictures from the video:

⁴ An institution established by Hamas in 2001 to deal with refugee affairs. It is headed by Dr. Issam Adwan.

⁵ See the July 20, 2014 bulletin, "Hamas and other terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip use schools for military-terrorist purposes: The case of rockets found hidden in an UNRWA school during Operation Protective Edge."



10. During Operation Protective Edge (July-August 2014) UNRWA found weapons hidden in its schools several times:

A. **On July 16, 2014, UNRWA reported having found 20 rockets hidden in one of its school in the Gaza Strip** (the name and location of the school were not reported). The children were on vacation but some of the UNRWA facilities were being used by civilians who had left their houses or whose houses had been destroyed. Immediately after finding the rockets UNRWA reported to the "relevant parties" (without specifying who they were), and reportedly instituted the necessary measures to protect the safety of the school. According to the UNRWA announcement, the agency "strongly condemned" both the act of hiding rockets in its school and the "group" (or "groups") responsible.

UNRWA STRONGLY CONDEMNS PLACEMENT OF ROCKETS IN SCHOOL

17 July 2014

Yesterday, in the course of the regular inspection of its premises, UNRWA discovered approximately 20 rockets hidden in a vacant school in the Gaza Strip. UNRWA strongly condemns the group or groups responsible for placing the weapons in one of its installations. This is a flagrant violation of the inviolability of...

Press Releases

[Read more](#)

UNRWA condemnation (unrwa.org, July 17, 2014)

B. **On July 22, 2014**, UNRWA reported that during a routine check **rockets had been found hidden in one of its schools in the Gaza Strip**. When the rockets were discovered the building was evacuated, and it was impossible to say how many rockets there were. The school building was situated between two other UNRWA schools, and at the time the three buildings were being used to house more than 1,500 Gazans who had left their houses. UNRWA reported immediately to the "relevant parties" and invested all its efforts in removing the rockets (UNRWA website, July 22, 2014).⁶

C. **On July 30, 2014**, an UNRWA spokesman reported that another cache of rockets had been found in an UNRWA school in the Gaza Strip. The spokesman did not mention the organization to which the rockets belonged. He said that UNRWA condemned the organization (or organizations) endangering civilians by placing weapons in a school, violating UNRWA's neutrality (Jerusalem Post, July 30, 2014).

⁶ **As it usually does, the Hamas ministry of the interior denied the UNRWA announcement.** According to the ministry, the event was "fabricated" to justify harming Gazan civilians and provide a cover for Israel's so-called "crimes" in the Gaza Strip. According to Hamas, all UNRWA schools were guarded by the agency and there was no way weapons could be brought in without the school guards knowing about it. In addition, according Hamas, they had no need of schools to store weapons (al-Ra'i, July 20, 2014).