



May 11, 2007

**Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center
at the Israel Intelligence Heritage
& Commemoration Center (IICC)**

“Felesteen”, a new Hamas-associated daily newspaper, was launched in Gaza City. A new weapon in Hamas’s battle for hearts and minds, the newspaper is meant to compete with the three Palestinian Authority dailies controlled or influenced by Fatah and Abu Mazen, and increase Hamas’s influence among the Palestinian public.



The homepage of the Felesteen website: Abu Mazen and Ismail Haniyah discuss the unity government; left: an image of the Felesteen front page

1. As of May 3, 2007, a **new daily called** Felesteen is published in Gaza City. The editor-in-chief, who claims to be independent, is **Mustafa al-Sawaf**, a journalist associated with the Hamas movement. Initially, the newspaper prints some 10,000 copies. The Chairman of the Board is **Dr. Ahmed Sa'ati**, a lecturer in the Islamic University of Gaza City. **The key members of the editorial staff (which consists of some 50 people) are associated with Hamas** (see Appendix). It is likely not a coincidence that the newspaper's launch date was scheduled for May 3, the World Press Freedom Day. The launching ceremony, with separate seating places for men and women, was attended by Hamas seniors. The ceremony was opened with a recitation of Quran verses by a journalist working for the Hamas radio station (AP, May 3).

2. The daily is published by **Al-Wasat Media and Publishing** (*Al-Wasat lil-I'lam wal-Nashr*), a company founded by a group of entrepreneurs to publish and distribute the newspaper. Headquartered in **Gaza City**, the company has another office in **Nablus**. The daily is printed separately in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip (a lack of a suitable printing press makes the newspaper difficult to publish in regular format in Gaza Strip). In addition to the **paper edition**, the daily is also published in an **online edition**. It has several reporters (most of them associated with Hamas) deployed in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Some of those reporters also work for other websites and publications associated with Hamas.

3. The launch ceremony, held on the eve of the publication of the newspaper's first edition, was attended by Palestinian PM Ismail Haniyah. In a speech given by Haniyah, he stressed the importance of another daily newspaper joining, as he put it, the extensive journalistic activity in the Palestinian Authority. Haniyah expressed his hope that the newspaper would defend the Palestinian people's rights and principles, including the "firm stand" (**sumud**) and the "resistance" (**muqawama**, i.e., violence and terrorism against Israel). Editor-in-chief Al-Sawaf said that while the daily would focus

on Palestinian issues, it would also be dealing with issues pertaining to the Arab and Islamic world.

4. **Felesteen** joins three existing dailies: **Al-Quds** (published in East Jerusalem), **Al-Hayat al-Jadidah**, and **Al-Ayyam** (published in Ramallah). It is the first daily published in the Gaza Strip. An examination of the newspaper's contents and the identity of its senior staff members (see Appendix) clearly shows that it is a first-of-a-kind Hamas daily.¹ Proclaiming itself "neutral and objective", it deals with a wide variety of topics, including local problems, political issues, and religious-Islamic issues, providing extensive coverage of the activities of Hamas and statements made by Hamas seniors. **The aim is to reach as many Palestinians as possible, increase Hamas's influence on all segments of Palestinian society, and compete with the three other dailies controlled or influenced by Fatah and Abu Mazen.**

Felesteen—yet another constituent of Hamas's "media empire"

5. Launching a daily newspaper **requires substantial funding, and considering the current economic crisis in the Palestinian Authority** it is clear that Hamas places considerable importance on expanding and developing its "**media empire**"² to improve its capabilities in the battle for hearts and minds. **Other expressions** of the efforts exerted by Hamas in recent months can be seen in two other main areas:³

a. **Television:** several months ago, the Hamas movement started operating a satellite TV station named **Saraj al-Aqsa** (The Light of Al-Aqsa). The station, which joined Hamas's terrestrial TV channel, is used to encourage terrorism and hatred against Israel (including among

¹ Until now, the weekly **Al-Resala** has been published in the Gaza Strip on behalf of Hamas.

² Reporting on the launch of the Felesteen newspaper, AP noted (May 3) it was Hamas's attempt to increase its influence on the Palestinian society using Hamas's "media empire".

³ In this context, see Information Bulletin published by the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center: ["Hamas recently upgraded its TV station and Internet sites. Although the Hamas government is bankrupt, the movement has invested massive sums in improving its propaganda assets, aware of their importance in the battle for hearts and minds against Israel and against its opponents in the internal Palestinian arena"](#) (February 23, 2007).

children and teenagers). It is also an important means in the propaganda and slander campaign against Fatah and Abu Mazen. At times, this media war is waged alongside violent clashes and the political struggle for control of the Palestinian Authority—a war highly important for the opposing factions.

b. Websites: In recent months, the Hamas movement has upgraded its leading websites. It upgraded the English-language website of its terrorist-operative wing (the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades), and launched new websites, such as for the new TV channel (Saraj al-Aqsa) and for the daily Felesteen. Also, Palestine-info, Hamas’s leading portal, was technically and graphically upgraded.



An article in the Felesteen website about the arrest of 15 Hamas operatives in Tulkarm (May 9, 2007)



The homepage of the website of Saraj al-Aqsa (May 9, 2007): a report on Ismail Haniyah’s meeting with Abu Mazen

Appendix

Felesteen senior editorial staff

1. **Mustafa al-Sawaf:** resident of the Gaza Strip, editor-in-chief. Until recently, he served as the manager of Al-Jil Press Office and a reporter for BBC radio. **He is said to be associated with Hamas** and expresses the movement's views in articles he publishes on the various Hamas websites. He frequently grants interviews to Saraj al-Aqsa, the Hamas satellite TV station.



Mustafa al-Sawaf

2. **Ahmed al-Sa'ati:** Chairman of the Board, lecturer in the Islamic University of Gaza City. He formerly served as the university's public relations manager and was a senior activist of the political bureau of the Salvation Party (a radical Islamic political organization which operated in the Gaza Strip and was associated with Hamas).



Ahmed al-Sa'ati

3. **Yasser al-Banna:** resident of the Gaza Strip. He is the director of the editorial staff and known as a journalist for the Hamas-affiliated Pal-media website and the Islam Online website.
4. **Walid Khaled:** originally from the village of Iskaka (in the vicinity of Salfit). He serves as the director of the newspaper's West Bank office. **He served long terms in Israeli prisons.**

5. **Dr. Yussuf Kamel Ibrahim:** a publicist, he writes a column named The Four Corners of the Earth for the newspaper. He is also a lecturer of geography in the University of Al-Aqsa in Gaza City.

6. **Dr. Hassan Muhammad Abu Hashish:** a publicist and assistant for the Deputy Information Minister (appointed by Hamas). Head of the Department of Journalism in the Islamic University and formerly the secretary of the information department of the Salvation Party. Serves as a commentator for Hamas publication Al-Resala, and writes a column for the daily Felesteen, published on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays.