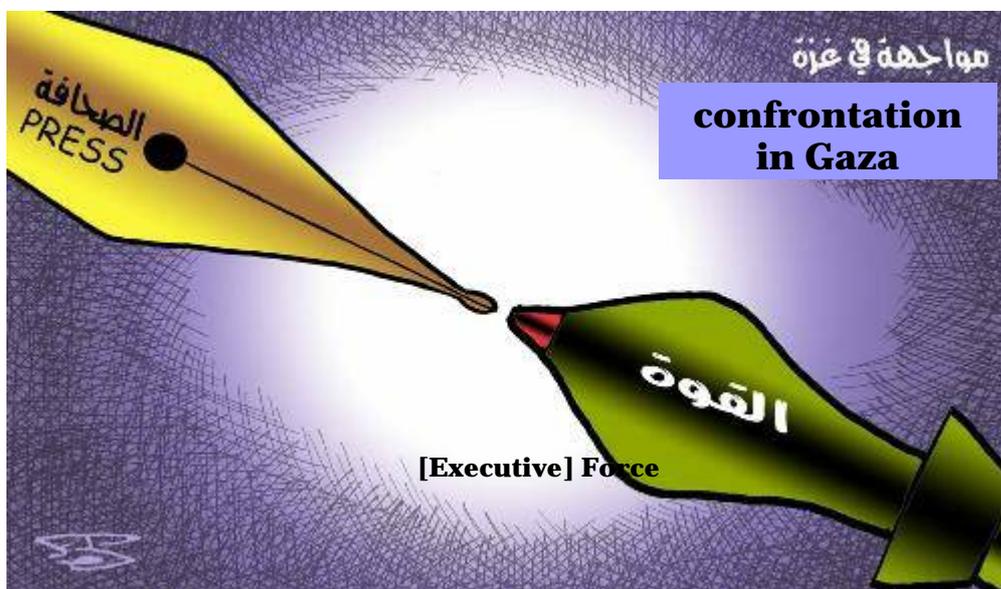




August 30, 2007

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

A fierce confrontation is being waged by Hamas and Fatah for control of the Palestinian media and for news coverage from the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria. It is part of the overall struggle between Hamas and Fatah for legitimacy.



The press against the [Executive] Force. A cartoon attacking Hamas' suppression of free speech in the Gaza Strip (Al-Ayyam, August 25).

Overview

1. In the wake of the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip a struggle developed between Hamas and Abu Mazen-Fatah for **control of the Palestinian media and news coverage from the Gaza Strip, and Judea and Samaria**. Both sides consider the media a very important arena. Each has established its own media, with the objective of controlling or at least influencing the information and verbal and visual messages sent from its territorial base. At the same time, each wants to hamper the news coverage of the other. Both sides are trying to establish the legitimacy of their governments and to enlist public support among Palestinians in the Arab-Muslim world.

2. **The confrontation over the media**, which is one manifestation of the general struggle for the legitimacy of rule, **is being conducted in the Gaza Strip by Hamas' Executive Force and by the Palestinian security forces in Judea and Samaria**. **The steps taken** include preventing the distribution of newspapers affiliated with the rival side; exerting pressure on journalists; attacking editorial boards, TV studios, radio stations and Internet site operators. All are accompanied by a propaganda war in which both Hamas and Fatah use their media outlets to sling mud at one another.

3. In the two months since the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, there has been a clear geographical division in Palestinian media, as in the government and security forces. **In the Gaza Strip the media are controlled by Hamas, which dictates, to a great extent, reported news. In Judea and Samaria most media activity is supervised by Abu Mazen and Fatah**, although Islamic media activity also continues (although to a lesser degree than in the past) at a local level.

4. **Hamas' media empire** includes a satellite TV channel, a radio station, a number of newspapers, a publishing house and an Internet network which includes more than 20 Websites in eight languages. It is situated for the most

part in the Gaza Strip but also has a branch in Britain.¹ **The empire operates far more efficiently than the media controlled by Abu Mazen and Fatah, and editorial policies are directed by the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip and Damascus, and are based on a clear, focused, single-minded strategy.**

5. The following Appendices present an analysis of the media struggle between Hamas and Abu Mazen-Fatah and a description of the media in the Gaza Strip, and Judea and Samaria.

¹ For further information see our August 20 Bulletin entitled [“Britain remains a major source of publishing and distribution of Hamas incitement”](#)

Appendix I

The Gaza Strip

6. **The Hamas media** provided almost exclusive coverage of the violent confrontation which led to the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, and they continue following the process of Hamas entrenchment there. Hamas spokesmen and Al-Aqsa TV controlled most of the information and propaganda which were transmitted from the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian populace, and to a great extent to Arab-Muslim and Western audiences as well. Foreign correspondents and **Palestinian journalists affiliated with Fatah** were not allowed access to battle zones **and information about security and civilian events in the Gaza Strip was – and still is – transmitted selectively and with bias.**

Hamas media control of reporting from the Gaza Strip



Exclusive pictures broadcast by Al-Aqsa TV during the clashes in the Gaza Strip. Left: Hamas operatives taking over Fatah's preventive security forces headquarters. Right: Some of the military equipment found in the offices (Al-Aqsa TV, June 14).

7. **Today Hamas closely supervises the Gaza Strip media and the news coverage emanating from it.** The Gaza Strip under Hamas rule does

not enjoy freedom of speech or the right to criticize, and no expressions of rival opinion are permitted. Fatah's broad media network in the Gaza Strip, which included its spokesmen, Internet sites, newspapers, radio stations and television channels, **collapsed almost completely and was partially transferred to Judea and Samaria**. In our assessment, only a few media people continue serving Fatah in the Gaza Strip. **Palestinian journalists and foreign correspondents** have said they feel pressured, and that the atmosphere in the Gaza Strip is one of intolerance controlled by repression, and that free news coverage is not allowed.

8. Hamas institutes legislation to justify its limitations on freedom of expression.² It also exerts pressure on the independent media in the Gaza Strip and on foreign correspondents working there.³ Since the Hamas takeover, independent or neutral media have been pressured and threatened. Some of them have adapted to the new situation and adopted a more positive approach to Hamas in their reports.⁴ Some examples follow of the attacks against and pressure exerted on the media operating in the Gaza Strip:

A. Newsmen attacked and arrested:

1) On August 24 Fatah held a mass demonstration in the Gaza Strip accompanied by prayers which was attended by several thousand people. During the demonstration Hamas security forces opened fire on the demonstrators and on newsmen covering the event. Three were arrested by Hamas operatives, including a cameraman working for Agence France Presse, a Reuters photographer was beaten and other correspondents were hurt (Reuters, August 24).

² On August 27 Hamas announced it had decided to enforce the Law of Publication and Distribution of 1995. At the time, the law gave Yasser Arafat the possibility of censoring journalist and opponents. Palestinian newsmen harshly condemned the law (Agence France Presse, August 27).

³ After the takeover Hamas established a special committee to "supervise and protect" foreign correspondents. The deputy minister of information of Ismail Haniya's government also announced that the government committee for the support of journalists had been reestablished, and would be a source of information pertaining to the government (August 27). However, Hamas establishes such committees to supervise journalists' activities and to prevent them from reporting freely, as is customary in democratic countries.

⁴ For example, Firas (www.FPNP.net) is an independent site whose reports tended to favor Fatah. Since the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip it now tends to favor Hamas.

2) On August 25 newsmen held a rally in Ramallah to protest the continuing Executive Force attacks on media institutions and freedom of speech in the Gaza Strip (Al-Ayyam, August 26).

3) On August 25 the Executive Force invaded the home of Sakher Abu al-Awn, a member of the journalists' union council and director of the office of Agence France Presse in the Gaza Strip with the intention of arresting him. The presence of other newspapermen and human rights workers in his home prevented his arrest.

4) On August 26 dozens of newspapermen demonstrated in Gaza City to protest the attempted arrest of Sakher al-Awn. One of the signs carried by the demonstrators read "The Israeli occupation failed to deter newspapermen, and so will Hamas' Executive Force" (Haaretz, August 27).

5) Riyadh al-Maliki, minister of information in the Salam Fayyad government, participated in the demonstration in Ramallah, and stated that the Hamas militia aggression against newsmen in the Gaza Strip on August 24 was a crime against humanity and an attack freedom of expression (Wafa News Agency, August 25).



Newspapermen in Ramallah protesting Executive Force violence against newspapermen in the Gaza Strip (Al-Arabiya TV, August 25)

B. Al-Arabiya TV, which is owned by Saudi Arabia and **broadcasts from Dubai**, was traditionally anti-Hamas (while Al-Jazeera TV tended to favor Hamas and was thus harshly criticized by Fatah). Hamas Internet surfers even nicknamed it "Al-Ibria" ("The Hebrew [station]"). In January 2007 Hamas announced a boycott of Al-Arabiya TV. On

August 13 Executive Force operatives invaded its offices and those of the Ramatan News Agency, and confiscated cameras and other equipment. **Ihab al-Ghusayn**, an interior ministry spokesman, when asked to respond, claimed the incidents were “mistakes” made by individuals who had been arrested and would stand trial (Al-Aqsa TV, August 13).



Executive Force operatives visiting the offices of Al-Arabiya TV after Hamas operatives invaded the office and confiscated equipment (Al-Arabiya TV, August 13, 2007).

C. **Ma’an is a leading Palestinian news agency**, centered in Bethlehem; it is neutral in its coverage of Palestinian Authority events. On July 7 it reported that Fawzi Barhoum, a Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, threatened **Nasser al-Lahham**, Ma’an’s editor-in-chief and a well-known journalist, warning them not to criticize Hamas. Al-Lahham was not frightened off and publicized the threat, which forced Fawzi Barhoum to issue a denial.

D. **Palestinian TV, under Abu Mazen’s control**, tried again to broadcast its popular talk show, “Red Line” (hosted by Hassn al-Kashaf) from the offices of the Ramatan News Agency (August 1). Following the broadcast the ministry of information of Ismail Haniya’s Hamas government issued an order directing the agency to stop airing the show (Palestinian TV, August 1)



“Red Line” broadcast banned in the Gaza Strip (August 1)

The current media situation in the Gaza Strip

9. The Hamas media are in the forefront in the Gaza Strip, while the Abu Mazen-Fatah media have collapsed. In addition, there are independent media and organization representatives operating in the Gaza Strip as well, whose activities are permitted by Hamas. The current situation is as follows:

A. Hamas’ satellite TV channel, Al-Aqsa TV, which began broadcasting in January 2006, became the primary source of reports from the Gaza Strip. It broadcasts via Nilesat, an Egyptian company.⁵ The offices of the PA’s official TV station, however, were attacked, vandalized and closed.⁶ The official Palestinian TV station stopped broadcasting pictures from the Gaza Strip and its commentators were forced to make do with transmitting their reports by telephone.

⁵ The minister of information in Salam Fayyad’s government appealed to Nilesat to stop transmitting Al-Aqsa TV broadcasts (Al-Misryyun, July 14). Their answer was not made public. In any case, **Nilesat still transmits Hamas’ Al-Aqsa TV broadcasts.**

⁶ On the evening of June 14, with the final Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, Hamas’ Al-Aqsa TV broadcast the following statement: “The transmission of Palestinian TV broadcasts has been suspended in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, after station employees fled for their lives.”



Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV claiming that Palestinian TV "which never was part of the Palestinian people," reports lies (Al-Aqsa TV, July 2007).

B. Radio stations:

1) Before the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, there were 13 active radio stations. After the takeover, which included the Hamas invasion and torching of Fatah's radio station, **five stations** affiliated with Fatah and the Palestinian Authority **stopped broadcasting**: Radio al-Huriya, Radio al-Shabab Sawt al-'Umal, Sawt al-Karamah and Sawt Filisteen. In addition, Radio al-Shaab, affiliated with the Popular Front, also stopped broadcasting.

2) **Today there are seven radio stations broadcasting from the Gaza Strip, most of them affiliated with Hamas and Islamists**: Hamas' Radio Al-Aqsa, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's Radio Al-Quds, four independent stations (Sawt al-Iman (The Voice of Faith), Radio al-Manar, Radio 'Alwan and the entertainment station, FM-Gaza). They all broadcast, as does Radio al-Qur'an al-Karim, which belongs to the Palestinian ministry of Islamic endowments.

C. Newspapers: Hamas distributes two newspapers in the Gaza Strip:

1) ***Felesteen***, a relatively new daily paper which has been publishing since May 2007. Its editorial board is located in Gaza and its editor-in-chief is Mustafa al-Sawaf, a Hamas-affiliated

journalist.⁷

2) ***Al-Risala***, Hamas' official house organ in the Gaza Strip. Since its founding in 1997 it has consistently followed an anti-PA line. It is published twice a week and printed by Al-Rantisi Printers in Gaza. About 4,000 issues are circulated, 70% of them given away for free in the mosques of the Gaza Strip.

3) On the other hand, **the distribution of the three large daily newspapers affiliated with Abu Mazen-Fatah** which are published in the West Bank (*Al-Ayyam*, *Al-Hayat al-Jadeeda* and *Al-Quds*) **is limited**. Since the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, there have been incidents in which Hamas' Executive Force prevented the newspapers from crossing through the Erez Crossing, claiming they were anti-Hamas propaganda.

D. The Internet:

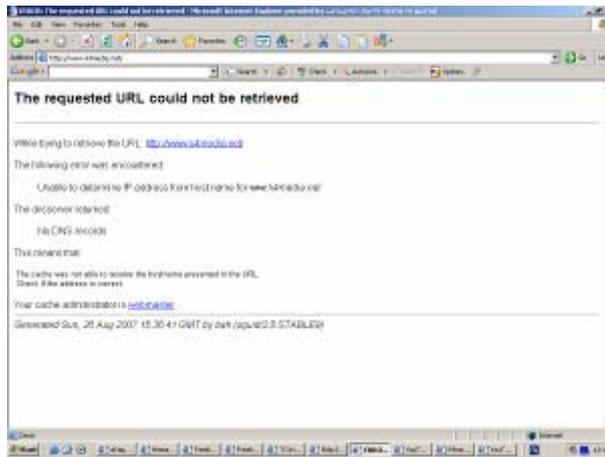
1) In recent years there has been a **sharp increase** in the number of Gazans using the Internet, which has become a way for them to maintain contact with the outside world.

2) Several Hamas-affiliated Websites report from the Gaza Strip and they enjoy a decided advantage in the field.⁸ Many Websites of the other Palestinian terrorist organizations also operate in the Gaza Strip, including the PIJ (whose site is called QudsNews) and the Popular Resistance Committees.

3) Fatah's news sites operating in the Gaza Strip (**Shabab, Kana'n, Sawt Filisteen**) either folded or transferred their activity to the West Bank. Only Websites authorized by Hamas are permitted in the Gaza Strip. One of those Websites is **Dunya al-Wattan**, a site edited by Bilal Khaled al-Hassan, the nephew of Hani al-Hassan, a senior Fatah figure.

⁷ For further information about *Felesteen* see our May 11, 2007 Bulletin entitled ["Felesteen, a new Hamas-associated daily newspaper, was launched in Gaza City"](#)

⁸ For further information about Hamas exploitation of the Internet, see our August 2, 2007 Bulletin entitled ["The Internet as a battleground used by the terrorist organizations"](#)



Fatah's news site, Kana'n, which is no longer in operation

E. **News agencies:** Three news agencies continue operating in the Gaza Strip, all struggling under Hamas pressure: **Wafa**, based in Ramallah, and two independent agencies, **Ma'an** and **Ramatan**.

Appendix II

Judea and Samaria

10. Abu Mazen and Fatah have tried to rehabilitate their information services by moving the base of their Gazan activities to **Ramallah**. Their spokesmen are responsible to Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, one of Abu Mazen's confidants, who was appointed to head Fatah's information center.

11. **The most important media operating in Judea and Samaria are those of the Palestinian Authority under Abu Mazen:** the newspaper *Al-Hayat al-Jadeeda*, Palestinian TV, the radio station The Voice of Palestine and the Wafa News Agency. They also report from the Gaza Strip, although their correspondents are continually harassed and threatened.

12. On the other hand, **Hamas's most important newspapers, *Al-Risala* and *Felesteen*, are banned in Judea and Samaria. Al-Aqsa TV's broadcasts from Judea and Samaria are severely limited:**

A. Al-Aqsa TV was essentially outlawed. The Palestinian communications ministry decided to stop its broadcasts because it did not receive official authorization to operate and because it “incites civil war and killing,” and preaches a culture of “extreme violence and hatred” (Palestinian News Agency, June 14, 2007).

B. On June 12, 2007 the Palestinian security forces broke into the offices of Al-Aqsa TV in Ramallah, detained three employees and confiscated all their equipment. Since then Al-Aqsa TV has not renewed its broadcasts from Ramallah.

C. The Palestinian security forces impose limitations on Al-Aqsa TV’s news coverage from other places. Muhammad Ashtiwi, the station’s West Bank director, claimed that armed men from Fatah invaded his office in Tulkarm and damaged the computers. He claimed they also confiscated cameras, prevented news coverage and even detained newsmen in Tubas, Jenin and Hebron (Felesteen, August 22).

D. As a result, Al-Aqsa TV now keeps a low profile in Judea and Samaria, and makes do with telephoned reports and interviews. Al-Aqsa TV’s attempts to rebuild its photo capabilities from Judea and Samaria have so far failed.

13. As a function of their control of the field, Abu Mazen and Fatah to a great extent dominate the media in Judea and Samaria. Hamas calls their media “Fatah media,” or “the Ramallah Authority media.” However, the Islamic media maintain a **local level** of activity, although much less than in the past.⁹

⁹ On August 17 Hamas’s Palestine-info forum reported that a Hamas publication called *Al-Hakika* was being distributed in the mosques in the Nablus region. Osama Hamdan, Hamas representative in Lebanon, announced the Abu Mazen’s security forces has closed Sana TV and Radio Jabal al-Nar in Nablus, and that the press offices had been closed in Nablus and other locations (Palestine-info Website, August 23).

The current media situation in Judea and Samaria

14. Abu Mazen and Fatah's most important media assets in Judea and Samaria are:

A. Three daily newspapers and the official Palestinian Authority paper:

1) ***Al-Hayat al-Jadeeda***: the official newspaper of the Palestinian Authority, published in Al-Bireh. It is affiliated with Abu Mazen and directed by Nabil Amru, one of his confidants. Its Web address is www.al-hayat-j.com.

2) ***Al-Ayyam***: the paper with the second largest circulation in the PA, published in Ramallah. Its editor-in-chief is Akram Haniya, who was Yasser Arafat's political advisor. Its Web address is www.al-ayyam.ps.

3) ***Al-Quds***: the most widely-read newspaper in the PA, owned by Marwan Abu Zulaf, printed in East Jerusalem and independent. Its Web address is www.alquds.com.

4) ***Al-Waqa'i'***: the PA's official newspaper, which prints laws and ordinances issued by the PA chairman, Abu Mazen and the prime minister, Salam Fayyad.¹⁰

B. **Palestinian TV**: the official PA television station. It broadcasts from Ramallah by satellite and ground-based antennas. It is subordinate to Abu Mazen's office and is not widely watched. An attempt to broadcast from the Gaza Strip using Ramatan office equipment was prevented by Hamas (July 25). Correspondents from the Gaza Strip report exclusively by telephone.

C. **News agencies**: **Wafa** is the most important Palestinian news agency. It is the official news agency of the Palestinian Authority and subordinate to Abu Mazen. It issues announcements and news items

¹⁰ A spokesman of Salam Fayyad's government recently warned that Ismail Haniya's government intended to publish its own version of *Al-Waqa'i'* and stated that the edicts and ordinances which would be published in it were not legal (Wafa News Agency, August 14).

from Abu Mazen and Salam Fayyad's government. **Ma'an News Agency** is also prominent. It is independent and based in Bethlehem.

D. **Radio**: the official radio station of the PA is **The Voice of Palestine**. It started broadcasting again from Judea and Samaria after Hamas destroyed its transmitters in the Gaza Strip. Its broadcasts can be received in the Gaza Strip.

E. **Websites**: a number of Websites affiliated with Abu Mazen and Fatah operate in the West Bank; some of them formerly operated in the Gaza Strip. The most prominent are the **Multaqa al-Shabab al-Fatahawi** (the **Fatah Youth Forum**) named after Yasser Arafat; a network of forum sites affiliated with Fatah. **Al-'Ilam**, also called the **Central Information Site**, which represents itself as Fatah's official information portal; the **Sawt Filisteen** site; the **Wafa News Agency's** site; **Palpress**, a news site affiliated with Muhammad Dahlan and Palestinian preventive security; **Al-Shabiba**, Fatah's youth and student portal; and **Al-Sarih**, a news site affiliated with Fatah.

The Website war



Palpress: Fatah's news site, formerly operating in the Gaza Strip, today in Ramallah.



A posting on Hamas' Executive Force site, claiming that Palpress posts lies.