



January 14, 2008

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

**The “Army of the Believers—the Al-Qaeda Organization in Palestine” has claimed responsibility for two attacks on the American International School in Gaza during President Bush’s visit to the Middle East. Other sites in the Gaza Strip associated with the US and Western culture have had to face similar problems.**

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**Some of the school windows were shattered and the school buses were set on fire  
(infolive website, January 13, 2008)**

## Overview

1. During the visit of President George Bush to the Middle East (January 9-11, 2008), two attacks were perpetrated on the American International School in Beit Lahiya in northern Gaza Strip:

a. On the morning of **January 10**, gunmen arrived at the school and asked the security guard to leave the area. The gunmen fired an **RPG** rocket on the second floor of the school building, causing damage to the building façade and to the school's arts and crafts room.

b. On the morning of **January 12**, there was another break-in at the school. Several gunmen who entered the school destroyed property and looted computers and school equipment. The gunmen also set fire to school buses and cars owned by the school.



**Damage caused to the school computers (infolive website, January 13, 2008)**

2. Following the second break-in, a note signed by **“Army of the Believers—the Al-Qaeda Organization in Palestine”** was found on the scene; it was addressed to the American International School. The attack, according to the note, was aimed against those who oppose Islam and those who work day after day to destroy the youth. The note warns anyone who might attempt to corrupt the youth or to open such corrupting institutions as that school.

3. The American International School is the only private school in Gaza, attended by some 150 students from kindergarten age to high school, all from wealthy Palestinian families. The school curriculum is American and the

language of instruction is English. The school was opened in September 2000 by a company owned by an American Arab named Walid Abu Shaqra, who operates ten similar schools.

## Reactions

**4.PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas** condemned the incidents, saying he held Hamas responsible for them. At the same time, he ordered restoration works to be carried out at the school, considering it “an important peak of study for the Palestinian people” (WAFA, January 12).

**5.Senior Hamas figures** in the Gaza Strip also condemned the attacks and promised an investigation into the incidents.

**6.School principal Ribhi Salem** said that the attack was carried out in protest of President Bush’s visit to the Middle East. According to the principal, the American International School is a purely Palestinian institution that has no connection to American elements. He also denied that the American government was providing assistance to the school.



**Right: school principal Ribhi Salem; left: the school website (www.aigaza.com, the website of the American International School)**

## **The American International School as a target for attacks**

7. Owing to the radical Islam that has established itself in the Gaza Strip, institutions and people associated with the West, Western culture, or Christianity **are often subject to persecution.** The Hamas movement, which took control over the Gaza Strip in June 2007, does nothing to put an end to that phenomenon, while the radical Islamic atmosphere in Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip encourages it to continue.

**8. It should be noted that the American International School has been a target for attacks since its very establishment.** In 2004, two foreign teachers who taught at the school were kidnapped, to be released unharmed one day later. Also in that year, a rocket was fired on the schoolyard. Yet another incident of rocket fire on the school took place on April 23, 2007, without anyone claiming responsibility. During the same week, an employee of the Palestinian Bible Society was murdered in the Gaza Strip and two internet cafés were attacked. **It is likely that those responsible for the attacks are radical Islamic elements that are hostile to the West and Western culture.**