



February 21, 2008

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

**YMCA library building in Gaza City blown up: another incident in a series of attacks on Western and Christian targets in the Gaza Strip by groups associated with the global jihad and radical Islam. The Hamas movement, which controls the Gaza Strip, does not put an end to the phenomenon.**

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**Attacks on Western targets in the Gaza Strip: burned down school buses belonging to the American International School in Beit Lahiya, northern Gaza Strip (infolive website, January 13, 2008)**

## Overview

1. On February 15, a gang of gunmen broke into the YMCA library building in Gaza City and blew it up. The building was destroyed, as were the thousands of books inside. This is yet another attack on Christian and Western institutions and personalities, perpetrated probably by the Army of Islam, one of the global jihad groups which thrive in the Gaza Strip. The Hamas movement, which controls the Gaza Strip, avoids taking active measures to prevent further such incidents.

## Attack on the YMCA library building

2. In the morning of February 15, fourteen masked gunmen broke into the YMCA library building in Gaza City. According to library director Issa Saba, the gunmen kidnapped the two security guards who were on the scene. They were later released in the Al-Shaja'iyya neighborhood. The gunmen also stole a computer and a car. They then set explosive charges at various locations in the library and detonated them. As a result of the explosion, **the library was reduced to rubble and the thousands of books inside were destroyed by fire** (Ma'an News Agency, February 15). It should be noted that the library services are used by all the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip.

3. Sources in the Gaza Strip reported that the Army of Islam, headed by Mumtaz Dughmush, was responsible for the attack on the YMCA building. According to those sources, the Army of Islam has decided to wipe out the Christian community in the Gaza Strip, causing embarrassment to the Hamas movement. Hamas security forces detained several Army of Islam operatives, but released them after a short while following a threat the Army of Islam that it would release its operatives by force (Palpress website, February 19; Ana Muslim forum, February 18).

4. Abu Mazen's spokesman condemned the attack against an institution which has served many Palestinians in Gaza City for decades (Wafa News Agency, February 15). Ibad al-Ghussain, the spokesman for the Hamas government Interior Ministry, referred to the incident as a "hideous, inconceivable crime", saying it was part of the propaganda war waged by Abu Mazen's Palestinian Authority and designed to illustrate the Islamic religious extremism prevailing in the Gaza Strip. In the wake of the incident, the Hamas Interior Ministry increased the security of Christian institutions and even appointed a commission to find those responsible for the attack (Filastin al-Aan, February 18).

## Summary and assessment

5. The Gaza Strip is currently home to some 3,500 Christians, most of them Greek Orthodox, who comprise a negligible minority of the 1,500,000 Gaza Strip residents. Even though Christians are a small, non-threatening minority, Christian institutions and personalities, as well as institutions associated with the West and Western culture, are constantly targeted by elements associated with the global jihad and radical Islam.<sup>1</sup> The Hamas movement, which controls the Gaza Strip, avoids taking effective action to put an end to such incidents.

6. The attack on the YMCA library by a group identified with the global jihad is possibly a **reaction to the publication of the Prophet Muhammad cartoons in the Danish press** (see below). There are several groups operating in the Gaza Strip, associated with the global jihad, which formerly attacked institutions and personalities associated with Christianity and Western culture. For example, during President Bush's visit to the Middle East (January 9-11, 2008), two attacks on **the American International School in Beit Lahiya, northern Gaza Strip**, were perpetrated by an organization calling itself "Army of the Believers, the Al-Qaeda organization in Palestine".<sup>2</sup> That incident was preceded by the murder of a Palestinian Bible Society employee and attacks on two Internet cafés (April 2007).

7. Those groups in the Gaza Strip associating themselves with radical Islam tend to respond to world events such as the republication of the Prophet Muhammad cartoons in the Danish press.<sup>3</sup> Abu Abir, the spokesman for the Zakaria Dughmush faction of the Popular Resistance Committees, held a press conference in which he released an exceptionally strong statement against Denmark and "the Western infidels". The announcement calls to deport Danish civilians from Muslim countries, remove Danish embassies, and burn the offices of those newspapers which republished the Prophet Muhammad cartoons: "We call upon Muslims and jihad warriors to hunt down all those pigs that painted the despicable cartoon or took part

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<sup>1</sup> Global jihad groups have been prospering in the Gaza Strip ever since Hamas seized power in June 2007. For an up-to-date state of affairs, see our Information Bulletin: ["A group called "Army of the Nation, Jerusalem" is yet another global jihad offshoot in the Gaza Strip. Since the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, there has been an increase in the propaganda and terrorist activities carried out by radical Islamic groups associated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad"](#) (February 11, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> See our Information Bulletin: ["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"](#) (January 14, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Recently, newspapers in Denmark have once again published the Prophet Muhammad cartoon which caused a stir across the Muslim world some two years ago. The cartoon was republished after three people were arrested in Denmark on charges of conspiring to murder the creator of the cartoon.

in its publication, **and to slaughter them at the doorstep of Muhammad's tomb...** (Moqawama website, February 18).



**Abu Abir, spokesman for the Zakaria Dughmush faction of the Popular Resistance Committees, at the press conference (Al-Jazeera, February 18)**

8. **Appendix:** an editorial from **Al-Quds al-Arabi**, a daily newspaper published in London. The article strongly criticizes the attack on the YMCA library in Gaza City, claiming that Hamas knows who is responsible for the “despicable crime” and calling upon Hamas to expose the attackers and bring them to justice.

# Appendix

## Main points of an editorial published in Al-Quds al-Arabi, a London-based newspaper in Arabic, which calls upon Hamas to reveal the identities of the attackers of the YMCA library and bring them to justice (February 17)



1.The author starts with the condemnation published by the Hamas movement of the “**criminal acts**” against the YMCA library in Gaza City on Friday, February 15, **perpetrated by supposedly unknown groups**. The author adds that while the condemnation is nice, it is not enough, **since Hamas is directly responsible** for the security of the Gaza Strip and all its citizens, regardless of their political or religious views, and it must expose the organization behind the attack and bring its members to justice.

2.The author claims that the crimes perpetrated by those groups **contradict the values of Islam**, according to which the people of the book and their religion must be honored and all necessary measures must be taken to protect them. According to the author, the perpetrators of the crime sought to create a rift, presenting a negative image of Islam and Muslims.

3. **The author points out that the motive behind the attack on the YMCA library was probably the mass demonstrations in the Gaza Strip against the negative cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad**, recently republished by Danish newspapers to provoke Muslims. He criticizes the Palestinian mood behind the attack, wondering how the Palestinians can protest against those who hurt Islam and its symbols when part of the Palestinian people dares to speak in favor of blowing up a Christian center, which **for the past fifty years has been spreading culture and knowledge to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, the vast majority of them Muslims.**

4. According to the author, the attack on the YMCA library is irrelevant, mostly because it contains little to none Christian books. Instead, the books held in the library contain the fundamentals of Arab and Muslim tradition, always serving as a basis for those who hold nationalist and Arab views. Those figures are known for promoting and spreading the spirit of tolerance, seeking to stand firmly and victoriously against the American and Israeli aggression.

5. The author claims that the agenda of “those attackers and criminals” cannot be Arab or Islamic. Instead, he says it serves the interests of Israel at a critical time in which Palestinians must deepen their national unity and show greater solidarity in facing the oppressive siege laid on them and the continuing chain of killings which targets their children and wives as well as their leaders.

6. According to the author, **the operative force of Hamas is well aware of the identities of those responsible for the “hideous crime”**. He adds that just as the operative wing and its commanders exposed the activity of the previous security apparatuses at special press conferences, they must prove their decency to the world and expose documents and information on that criminal front, which hides behind an Islamic façade and attacks those Christian institutions. Those attacks are usually perpetrated, **“as we have observed, in a manner which repeats itself, getting uglier each time.”**

7. To summarize, the author states that those who committed the attacks must be held accountable and that their criminal activity must be curbed, seeing as they are dangerous to the Palestinian people. He claims that the kidnapers of British journalist Allan Johnston stabbed the Palestinian people in the back by terrorizing Western media and preventing them from entering the Gaza Strip due to fear. Thus, they provided Israel with a justification for its recent crimes, such as cutting off power and supply of medications.