



Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

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Terrorism and the media: Hamas gives priority and invests resources in rehabilitating, reinforcing and expanding its media empire, damaged during Operation Cast Lead.



Ismail Haniya reading from the Qur'an at the new Al-Qur'an Al-Kareem radio station, which disseminates religious Islamic material (July 6, 2009).¹

¹ <http://www.israj.net/vb/t3517>, July 8, 2009.

Overview

1. Since its inception Hamas has been well aware of the importance of the battle for hearts and minds in its campaign against Israel. During Operation Cast Lead its media suffered damages, particularly Al-Aqsa TV, the Hamas de-facto administration's most important media outlet. Nevertheless, the media continued functioning during and after the fighting. Once Operation Cast Lead ended, the Hamas media launched a campaign to disseminate the narrative of a Hamas victory.² In addition, they also reported widely about other issues on its agenda, including relations with the Palestinian Authority, the challenges of rebuilding the Gaza Strip and the conflict with Israel.

2. Since the end of Operation Cast Lead the Hamas de-facto administration has **given top priority to rehabilitating and reinforcing its media empire**. It has not settled for repairing the media which were damaged, **but is also upgrading them to improve and strengthen its propaganda capabilities**. To that end Hamas has taken a number of steps, including launching new newspapers and magazines, establishing a news agency, and changing the substance of its leading television channel and the design of its television stations and websites. One of the most prominent developments is that its media have become **more intensely Islamic**, among them Al-Aqsa TV, the new Radio Al-Qur'an Al-Kareem and PALDF (Palestine Dialogue Forum), its main Internet forum.

3. Hamas's media have been rebuilt despite the Gaza Strip's **grave financial distress**, and resources are sometimes allotted at the expense of the population's pressing needs. In our assessment, Hamas raises the funds necessary for the day-to-day running and expansion of its media by exploiting foreign aid, primarily from **Iran** (which annually transfers hundreds of millions of dollars to Hamas's political and military-terrorist wings).³

² For further information see our January 20, 2009 bulletin "The battle for hearts and minds: Within Hamas's effort to perpetuate a victory myth in Operation Cast Lead, its spokesmen release false descriptions about events of the fighting and their false successes. The difficulty for Hamas lies in the discrepancy between the (false) rhetoric and the situation on the ground" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hamas_e048.pdf.

³ For further information see our January 12, 2009 bulletin "Iranian Support of Hamas" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/iran_e004.pdf. An Algerian journalist recently revealed that Iran funds Hamas's Al-Quds TV, which broadcasts from Beirut. For further information see our July 5, 2009 bulletin "Terrorism and media: Bitter dispute within Al-Quds TV, Hamas's satellite TV channel, which began broadcasting from Beirut seven months ago, led to the dismissal of an Algerian journalist. He criticized the channel's triviality and exposed its Iranian financing, also used for the directors' life of luxury" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/mt_e007.pdf.

4. This document includes the following sections:
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 - B. The Hamas media during Operation Cast Lead.
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Hamas's media empire: overview

5. Hamas's media empire currently includes the following: **Two satellite television stations** (Al-Aqsa TV, the mouthpiece of the Hamas de-facto administration in the Gaza Strip, and Al-Quds TV, supervised by the "external" leadership in Damascus); **a number of radio stations** (among them Sawt Al-Aqsa and Al-Qur'an Al-Kareem, a station which broadcasts religious programs); **a daily newspaper** (*Felsteen*) published in the Gaza Strip; other publications issued in the Gaza Strip and beyond (including *Al-Risala*, issued in the Gaza Strip, and *Filastin al-Muslimah*, apparently issued in Britain); **a number of news agencies and more than 20 websites and forums** (the most important are the Palestine-Info website, which appears in eight languages, and the PALDF forum). They are Hamas's main tools for disseminating its propaganda and in waging its battle for hearts and minds, and give it **a media advantage over its rivals** (chiefly Fatah and the Palestinian Authority).

6. Hamas aims its media at a number of target audiences:

- i. **The Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria** are the most important targets for marketing the Hamas de-facto administration in the Gaza Strip and for inculcating the ideology, strategy and tactics of both the movement and the Hamas de-facto administration. After Operation Cast Lead they stressed the marketing of Hamas's "victory narrative" and below-the-belt propaganda attacks on the Palestinian Authority, but emphasis was later put on other topics, such as aggrandizing the activities of the Hamas administration.

- ii. **The Arab-Muslim world:** Hamas brings Arabs and Muslims timely information about events in the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and seeks to obtain their support.

They receive Al-Aqsa TV broadcasts via Arab satellites (Arabsat and Nilesat), and extensive use is made of the Internet. The Palestine-Info website, Hamas's most important site, is translated into languages spoken in the non-Arab Muslim countries, such as Farsi, Turkish and Urdu.

iii. **The West also has a large target audience** and is fed a great deal of "information" about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, chiefly through the Internet, with the objective of securing support or sympathy for Hamas and to defame Israel. Since Obama was elected president the Hamas media **have presented the United States a smiling face** to represent itself as more pragmatic, but without any fundamental change in its positions.

iv. **Israel as a target audience for Hamas:** As opposed to Fatah and the Palestinian Authority, Hamas does not see a need to appeal to Israelis. Although some of its websites appear in many languages, Hebrew is not one of them (The Palestinian News Agency, on the other hand, recently launched a Hebrew website.).

The Hamas media during Operation Cast Lead

7. During Operation Cast Lead the IDF did a great deal of damage to the Hamas media. On the second day of the fighting it attacked the building from which Al-Aqsa TV broadcast. The offices of *Al-Risala* were also hit and the activities of Hamas's local Internet sites were disrupted. Nevertheless, Hamas's main media network continued functioning and its messages reached the various target audiences as its capabilities were repaired during the fighting. The external Hamas leadership in Damascus provided a solution for the on-air absence of the Gazan Hamas leaders, who hid for fear of being attacked.

8. After the first shock, Hamas's media and spokesmen returned to routine operations, as follows:

i. **Television broadcasts:** On December 27, 2008 the Al-Aqsa TV building was bombed. Broadcasting stopped for a short time and was later resumed. The station's general manager said that the station had moved to other locations (Al-Aqsa TV, December 28, 2008). Its schedule during Operation Cast Lead consisted mostly of inciting anti-Israeli songs and pictures broadcast live from the Gaza Strip (in many instances, pictures taken from the Ramattan News Agency). Al-Aqsa TV broadcasts continued, updating events on the ground using crawls which appeared on the screen every few minutes and airing telephone interviews from operatives in the field. The news was broadcast from an improvised studio, while programs of a religious nature

were occasionally broadcast from studios outside the Gaza Strip where visiting Islamic preachers and political commentators gave the Palestinians moral support. **Al-Quds TV**, broadcasting from Beirut, continued its operations uninterrupted and spearheaded Hamas's propaganda campaign.

ii. **Newspapers and periodicals:** During the Operation *Felesteen* and *Al-Risala* stopped publishing (the *Al-Risala* building was hit during the fighting). On January 8, 2009 *Felesteen* partially resumed publications and even launched Arab and English websites asking surfers to sign a global petition condemning Israel's activities in the Gaza Strip.



The *Felesteen* website homepage in English: A call to boycott Israel and the United States. The name of the campaign's supervisor, Awad Qarni, figures prominently. Qarni is an anti-Semitic, anti-American Saudi Arabian cleric.

iii. **Websites:** Most of Hamas's websites continued operating with temporary interruptions. The main website, **Palestine-Info**, was occasionally non-operative, as were the **Al-Aqsa TV** and the **Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades** websites.⁴ The *Felesteen* site also had difficulties functioning. On the other hand, during the fighting Hamas launched three new sites: a file-sharing site called **PalTube** (a YouTube imitation) featuring propaganda videos and live **Al-Quds TV** broadcasts, a news site of Hamas's PALDF forum for the events taking place in the Gaza Strip and a new version of the **Islamic Block** site (Hamas's student wing).

⁴ On January 6, 2009, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades website resumed operation after a hiatus of several days. According to its homepage, it had been subject to an attack of Zionist hackers as part of the so-called Israeli "information war."

9. Hamas received **massive propaganda support from the popular Qatari station, Al-Jazeera TV**. After the IDF hit its media, **Al-Jazeera TV provided Hamas with massive propaganda and strategic support**. It broadcast Al-Aqsa TV programs and aired announcements by **Abu Obeida**, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades spokesman. Al-Jazeera TV also showed close-ups of the bodies of women and children, and was careful to report only civilian victims, ignoring the losses of terrorist operatives.



Al-Jazeera TV in the service of Hamas: Abu Obeida, Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades spokesman, in an Al-Aqsa TV broadcast picked up by Al-Jazeera (Al-Jazeera TV, January 6, 2009).

Rehabilitating Hamas's media after Operation Cast Lead

Television

10. Al-Aqsa TV is part of the **Al-Aqsa media network**, which includes the television channel, radio broadcasts, the Al-Aqsa information authority, courses in journalism, and the "Asda' City for Artistical and Media Production," otherwise sometimes known as Hamaswood (located on the ruins of one of the Israeli settlements evacuated during the disengagement).



The homepage of the Al-Aqsa media portal.

11. Immediately following Operation Cast Lead, Hamas began rebuilding the Al-Aqsa TV station, finishing on April 24, 2009, when the channel returned to its pre-Operation broadcasting capabilities. There were, however, changes in personnel (for example, its director, **Fathi Hamad**, was named interior minister, replaced by Mahmoud Abu Dief, a senior Hamas figure). Since it has gone back on the air, changes can be noted in the content of its broadcasts and in its visual aspects, indicating that it is selling itself as the de-facto **Hamas administration's establishment channel**.

12. Since Operation Cast Lead, Al-Aqsa TV has increased and expanded the number of its cultural, social and leisure programs. There has also been **a significant increase in the volume of daily religious programs**, which has come at the expense of current events. In our assessment, the volume of daily religious programs is 150% greater than it was before Operation Cast Lead. Some of the new religious programs include "Pages of Glory," which presents stories and traditions from Muslim history which preach "resistance" [i.e., terrorism]; "The Islamic Point of View," which deals with the Islamic approach to daily issues; and programs presented by women for women, which emphasize the modesty of the presenters. Only completely veiled women appear on camera. When pictures are taken from Israeli or other foreign channels, the faces of the women are either out of focus or not shown.



Left: Women appear on Al-Aqsa TV completely veiled except for their eyes. Right: An female Israeli commentator reading the news on Israel Channel 2, her face deliberately out of focus (June 1, 2009).

13. The Al-Aqsa network also runs a **media training and development center** to train Gazans to write for newspapers in the spirit of Hamas’s ideology and policies. As of June 2009, the center had four graduating classes.



Website of the Al-Aqsa center for media training and development: Commencement exercises for the third and fourth graduating classes, men to the left, women to the right (July 14, 2009).

14. **Al-Quds TV**, operated in Lebanon by the external Hamas leadership in Damascus, began broadcasting on November 22, 2008, shortly before Operation Cast Lead.⁵ It is owned by the Al-Quds radio and television company in **London**,⁶ **composed of Arab and Palestinian businessmen and media personnel**. Its general manager is **Nabil al-Atibi**. The office in Gaza is run by a Hamas-affiliated journalist named **Imad al-Faranji**. Al-Quds TV’s offices are

⁵ For further information see our November 18, 2009 bulletin “[Al-Quds, Hamas’s second satellite TV channel, went on air on November 11, further expanding that movement’s media empire.](#)”

⁶ London is one of the focal points of Hamas’s media empire, alongside Damascus, Beirut and the Gaza Strip.

in **Beirut**, despite the fact that it claims to broadcast from “the heart of Jerusalem.” The channel has a website which also broadcasts its programs. The Algerian and Arab media recently revealed a glimpse of what goes on behind the scenes at Al-Quds TV, the result of fierce conflicts within the directorate which led to the dismissal of Algerian journalist **Yehya Abu Zakaria**. He revealed that Iran was funding the channel and accused its directors of low-level programming.⁷ Despite the claims, Hamas apparently regards the channel as serving the important function of enabling the external leadership to reach audiences in the Middle East and beyond.



The studios during the first days of Al-Quds TV (Hamas’s Palestine-Info website, November 12, 2008).

15. Two of Hamas’s channels broadcast via Arab communications satellites: **Nilesat**, owned by an Egyptian company and broadcasting to the Middle East and North Africa, and **Arabsat**, a pan-Arab company, approximately one third of whose stock is owned by Saudi Arabia.⁸ The programs are also received by Muslim communities in several southern European countries. **That allows Hamas to spread its broadcasts of hatred and incitement to wide audiences in the Arab-Muslim world beyond the Middle East.**

⁷ For further information see our July 5, 2009 bulletin “Terrorism and media: Bitter dispute within Al-Quds TV, Hamas’s satellite TV channel, which began broadcasting from Beirut seven months ago, led to the dismissal of an Algerian journalist. He criticized the channel’s triviality and exposed its Iranian financing, also used for the directors’ life of luxury” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/mt_e007.pdf.

⁸ Both Hezbollah’s Al-Manar TV and Hamas’s Al-Aqsa TV are supported by Nilesat and Arabsat.

Radio

16. Hamas has a number of radio stations, some of them focusing on the news and some on religion. During Operation Cast Lead they were sometimes the only source of information because the technology of radio broadcasting is relatively simple. The most popular station is **Sawt Al-Aqsa**, operated by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. It is a local station broadcasting mainly news and information about local activities.

17. On March 15, 2009 a **new station** went on the air, called **Al-Qur'an Al-Kareem** ("the holy Qur'an"), directed by Sheikh Heidar al-Bahuri; it also has a website currently under construction. Most of its programs deal with religious Islamic material. Ismail Haniya, head of the Hamas de-facto administration, personally used the station to send Islamic messages. Launching the new station is part of the Islamization of the Hamas media, one aspect of the overall Islamization of the Gaza Strip undertaken by Hamas.



Ismail Haniya at the Al-Qur'an Al-Kareem radio studio, July 6, 2009.⁹

18. To renew the activities of the Gaza Strip radio stations and to increase its control over them, the Hamas de-facto administration exempted them from paying the 2009 registration fees. It also retroactively exempted them from other debts, on condition that they arrange

⁹ <http://www.israj.net/vb/t3517>, July 8, 2009.

their activities with the Hamas administration communications ministry by the end of July 2009 (*Filastin Al-Yawm*, May 17, 2009).

News agencies

19. **The PalMedia** agency, which operated in the Gaza Strip until recently, stopped its operations for unknown reasons, while **two new agencies were established**:

i. On July 5 the **Safa News Agency** began operations (the similarity in sound between Safa News Agency and the Palestinian Authority's Wafa News Agency may not be coincidental). Its offices are located in the Rimal section of Gaza City. It claims to have dozens of correspondents spread throughout the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria, Jerusalem, Israel and the refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon. It defines itself as independent, although it is headed by Hamas-affiliated **Yasser Abu Hin**, who was formerly the director of PalMedia. The Safa website is currently available only in Arabic.¹⁰



The homepage of the Safa News Agency (safa.ps, July 7, 2009).

ii. **The Shihab News Agency** has been in operation for a number of months. It belongs to the Al-Aqsa communications network.

¹⁰ The Wafa News Agency website appears in Arabic, English, French and Hebrew. For more information about launching the Wafa News Agency, see our July 6, 2009 bulletin "The Palestinian Authority and Fatah improve their media capabilities by launching a satellite TV channel and a Hebrew website" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/pa_e004.pdf.

Websites

20. After Operation Cast Lead **most of the Hamas websites were redesigned**, including the **Palestine-Info website**; **PALDF**, its most important forum; PalTimes; the **Filastin al-'An** website and others. It seems that the violent rhetoric of those sites has been somewhat reduced, in all probability the result of Hamas's policy of restraint and the smiling face it presents to the West, particularly the United States, although its fundamental positions remain the same.

21. The main changes which have been carried out or planned are the following:

General sites

i. **The Palestine-Info network** represents Hamas's leading sites, which appear under the name of the Palestine Information Center. It is Hamas's main portal and includes sites in **Arabic, Farsi, English, French, Russian, Turkish, Malaysian and Urdu**. After Operation Cast Lead it remained essentially a news site but its rhetoric became less violent than that which accompanied the massive rocket attacks against the western Negev before the Operation.

ii. **The website of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades**, Hamas's military-terrorist wing was upgraded in June 2008 (a few months before Operation Cast Lead). It included many links, including one to "the department of Zionist affairs," which follows the news in Israel; one to statistics; one to the operational activities of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, which includes documentary video clips. **Technically speaking**, the site responds more rapidly than previously and a great deal of audio and visual material has been added. In July 2009 it announced that it would soon upgrade its English site.

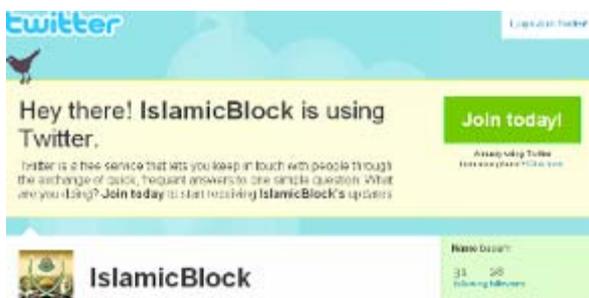


The Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades' website announces the coming upgrade of its English website.

iii. The **Al-Kutlah al-Islamiyyah** site, which represents Hamas's student wing, is currently not accessible. It will be replaced by a new, updated site, and apparently permission to log in will be required. In addition, Al-Kutlah al-Islamiyyah has also joined the largest social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter.



Subscription form for Al-Kutlah al-Islamiyyah.



Al-Kutlah al-Islamiyyah on Facebook and Twitter.

Media sites

iv. **The Al-Aqsa portal** includes a number of media sites belonging to the Al-Aqsa network. The **Al-Aqsa TV website** has been technologically updated and improved and now features video clips. In addition, the channel's programs can be viewed online through the site. The site's directors also use YouTube to upload videos easily and cheaply.



The Al-Aqsa TV homepage (July 14, 2009).



The Radio Sawt Al-Aqsa website (July 14, 2009).

v. **The Radio Sawt Al-Aqsa site** was upgraded and today is modern with many technological capabilities.

vi. **The Al-Quds TV site** was inaugurated along with the TV channel in 2008. It has not changed since. It enables surfers to watch the channel online and includes a programming schedule.



The Al-Quds TV website (July 14, 2009).

vii. **Hamas's Al-Risala** has announced it will soon upgrade its website.



The homepage of Al-Risala announces a forthcoming upgrade (July 15, 2009).

Hamis de-facto administration websites

viii. **The interior ministry's website** can be accessed in Arabic, English and French, and reports about ministry activities. It is currently undergoing changes to integrate a news website into the official ministry website.



The website of the Hamas de-facto administration's interior ministry.

ix. The website for religious edicts (*fatwas*) and law apparently belongs to the ministry of justice and supports the Islamizing of the Gaza Strip. It was launched in early July and currently does not have much to offer. In the future it is expected to include all the *fatwas* and laws of the Hamas de-facto administration.



The homepage of the Hamas de-facto administration's website for religious edicts and law.

x. The website of the ministry of justice has a new site which was launched at the beginning of the year and operates in competition with that of the Palestinian Authority's ministry of justice.

Internet forums

22 Hamas's **PALDF** site has been active since 2001 and is Hamas supporters' main virtual dialogue site. It hosts tens of thousands of surfers and has become an important institution; Hamas de facto administration officials also use the site. It is heavily censored to prevent information leaks. The site's administration recently issued a personnel update and a new regulation to **secure the information posted on the site and ensure its Islamic spirit**, noting that violators would be punished.

Newspapers

23. Once the fighting ended Hamas's newspapers and periodicals returned to the regular publishing schedule. Hamas added a series of publications, including local, professional and sectoral papers intended to disseminate Hamas propaganda within the Gaza Strip.

24. The leading publications in the Gaza Strip today are the daily ***Felesteen***, launched in May 2007. Although it represents itself as independent, it expresses the positions of the Hamas movement (more than those of the Hamas de-facto administration). It is news-oriented with a few editorials and investigative reports. Its editor is Hamas activist **Mustafa al-Sawaf**. Another Hamas publication is ***Al-Risala***, published since the days of the Islamic Salvation Party, which officially represents the position of the Hamas movement. It is more of a magazine and contains investigative reports, articles and interviews rather than straight news reports.

25. Since Operation Cast Lead new publications have appeared:

- i. The weekly ***Al-Ra'i***, which began publishing in March 2009. It serves as the Hamas de-facto administration's mouthpiece and is expected to eventually become a daily paper. So far 12 issues have appeared containing reports, articles, columns and announcements from the Hamas administration. It reports on the administration's activities and is supervised by its information office.



The masthead of *Al-Ra'i*, the new weekly issued by the Hamas de-facto administration.

ii. A professional newsletter called *Alziraa'*, circulated by the agriculture ministry. It deals with issues of interest to Gazan farmers and fishermen, and stresses the damages incurred by the agricultural sector during Operation Cast Lead.



Alziraa', the agriculture ministry newsletter.

iii. In February 2009 the Gaza City municipality began publishing a local newspaper every month called *Here Is Gaza*, which contains news of the city, interviews with important Gazans and announcements for the residents.



Here Is Gaza, local newspaper.

Books

26. It has been reported that Hamas's information office is working on a collection of stories written by Palestinian media personnel about their experiences during Operation Cast Lead, which will be published as a book.

Movies

27. On July 17 **the premiere of Hamas's first full-length movie was held** in the Gaza Strip, attended by Ismail Haniya, head of the Hamas de-facto administration. Called "**Imad Aqel**,"¹¹ it was produced by the Al-Aqsa communications network. The movie tells the story of an Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades commander killed in November 1993 in a firefight with IDF forces. It cost \$200,000 to produce and written by Mahmoud al-Zahar, one of the Gazan heads of Hamas. It contrasts Imad Aqel's "bravery" with the "helplessness and inferiority of Israel." Palestinians play the parts of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Defense Minister Ehud Barak. They speak Hebrew with heavy Arabic accents and the text is accompanied by Arabic subtitles. The actresses wear long dresses and are veiled, and during the showing of the movie men and women sat separately.



Left: Advertisement for the movie "biography" of Imad Aqel (Hamas's Palestine-Info website, July 19, 2009). Right: Students at the Islamic University in Gaza City watching the movie (Aqsatv website, July 17, 2009).

¹¹ **Imad Hassan Ibrahim Aqel** (1971-1993) was a commander of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas's military-terrorist wing. Aqel was involved in killing 11 IDF soldiers and in the murders of an Israeli civilian and four Palestinians.