



Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

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Hamas summer camps in the Gaza Strip integrate social activities with political and Islamic indoctrination and semi-military training. The camps' goal is to foster the next generation of Hamas terrorist operatives.



بدء مخيمات انتصار غزة للقدس عزة

Opening ceremony at one of Hamas' summer camps. The banner reads "The victory of Gaza – glory for Jerusalem" The boys wear green Hamas caps and wave the flags of Hamas and Palestine. At the upper right is a giant poster, apparently of Hamas *shaheeds* [martyrs], and another, apparently of Sheikh Yassin, who was a Hamas founder (Filastin al-'An website, July 14, 2009).

A general description of the Hamas summer camps

1. During the summer of 2009 Hamas opened, as usual, its summer camps for children and adolescents throughout the Gaza Strip with the slogan "Victory for Gaza, glory for Jerusalem." The camps are run by the Hamas movement, the Hamas de-facto administration (whose Religious Endowments Ministry runs camps for Qur'an memorization) and Hamas-affiliated groups (such as its student organization).

2. Hamas considers the camps an important tool for inculcating the younger generation with its ideology and **for fostering the next generation of terrorist operatives**. On the other hand, UNRWA, which also runs many camps, is regarded by Hamas as the main competitor for the hearts and minds of the youth. The UNRWA camps are therefore the objects of a Hamas mud-slinging campaign which represents them as corrupting the youth. On a scale much smaller than Hamas and UNRWA, Fatah, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, various Islamic charitable societies and other groups also run summer camps.



Opening ceremonies at Hamas summer camps (Al-Aqsa TV, July 4, 2009).



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Summer camp for elementary school children in the northern Gaza Strip. The banner reads "Victory camps for Gaza, glory for Jerusalem: youth overcomes the highest mountain peaks and recognizes only Islam as a religion" (Hamas's PALDF forum, July 7, 2009).



Figure made of modelling clay at one of the camps. The inscription reads "Victory for Gaza, glory for Jerusalem" (Hamas's PALDF forum, July 7, 2009).

3. According to the Palestinian and Arab media, Hamas ran **700 camps** this summer throughout the Gaza Strip which were attended by **100,000 Palestinian youths** (from elementary school pupils to university students). Preparations for them lasted months, and their 1,500 instructors participated in training courses before the season opened. Hamas appointed a committee and subcommittees responsible for running the camps. There was a marketing campaign to encourage attendance with the participation of Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV and a designated Internet site. The camps' budget was estimated at \$2 million (Camps' spokesman Amir Abu al-Amarin, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, July 21, 2009).

Indoctrination at Hamas summer camps

4. Hamas claims that the camps promote social activities such as swimming, trips, sports competitions, drawing, singing, computer classes, etc., although reports of what actually goes on clearly show that **at the same time, the youth undergo an intensive process of political and Islamic indoctrination (as occurred in previous years.)** The process is implemented by the instructors and senior Hamas figures visiting the camps.

5. The Hamas activists' statements do not hide the fact that the objective of the camps is to foster the movement's next generation. **Abdallah al-Ghafur**, a member of the summer camps' oversight committee, said that "the core of the struggle today is for the [younger] generation," which had to be fostered according to [Islamic] religious laws and trained for endurance and patience (Hamas's Palestine-Info website, July 9, 2009). Hamas activist **Mahmoud Abu I'd** said that the objective of the camps is to prepare the children **to take the leadership of the path of "victory and liberation" upon themselves**. Talkbacks on Hamas-affiliated sites responded by saying **they hoped the camps would produce "soldiers for Jerusalem and Gaza."**

6. The following are examples of the methods of indoctrination employed in the camps:

i) A correspondent for *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* reported that to indoctrinate the campers, posters with Hamas slogans were hung throughout the camps and imprinted on the caps and shirts distributed at them. In addition, slogans were shouted during sports training. They were also repeated in lectures given by senior Hamas figures who visited the camps (*Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, July 12, 2009). Among the senior figures were Khalil al-Hayeh, Musheir al-Masri and Fawzi Barhoum.



Hamas activists visit the summer camps (Summer camps website, www.gazacamps.ps, July 12, 2009).

ii) Hamas *shaheeds* [martyrs], some of them killed in terrorist attacks, are turned into role models for Gazan youth: The biographies of Hamas *shaheeds* are studied by the campers (Chinese News Agency, June 21, 2009). Posters of shaheeds are distributed and carried during processions. In addition, youth take part in Hamas propaganda exercises, for example, in demonstrations against the so-called "Israeli siege" or at the Rafah crossing to demand the release of Ayman Nawfal, a senior Hamas terrorist operative detained by Egypt.



Banner with the summer camp's slogan carried by Hamas green-capped adolescents, participants in a camp named "Breaking the siege" (Maktoub, June 28, 2009).



Adolescents wearing green Hamas caps hold a poster stating that their summer camp is named for Sayid Siyam, the late head of Gaza's security and minister of the interior of the Hamas de-facto administration, killed by the IDF during Operation Cast Lead. The poster was carried in a procession through the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood of Gaza City (Maktoub website, June 28, 2009).



Children at a summer camp wear green Hamas caps at a demonstration against the so-called "Israeli siege" of the Gaza Strip (Summer camps website).



Children in shrouds at a presentation to send the false message that the so-called "siege" of the Gaza Strip starves them to death (Hamas's PALDF forum, July 13, 2009).

iii) The official website of the central committee for the summer camps noted that the objective of the camps was to reinforce the bond between youth and Islam [radical Islam with Hamas' political interpretation]. According to the site, there was a need **"for the life of a soldier in the service of Islam,"** as well as a need for identifying **"a group of outstanding students** who would be able to preach for Allah and Islam in the main mosques and schools, and **to maintain contacts with them after the camp [ended]."** Some of the camps emphasized Qur'an memorization, and Ismail Haniya, head of the Hamas de-facto administration, announced that students who excelled would receive a prize (travel expenses for a pilgrimage to Mecca). Qur'an memorization in the camps was widely covered by Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV during June and July 2009. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad held its own Qur'an memorization summer camps, organized by the **Iqra** charitable society (which operated 265 camps attended by 1,200 campers, both male and female).



Closing ceremony at a summer camp for Qur'an memorization in the southern Gaza Strip (Summer camp website, July 4, 2009).



Summer camp for Qur'an memorization in the town of Beit Hanoun, northern Gaza Strip (Al-Quds website, July 15, 2009).



Children pray at a summer camp (Hamas's PALDF forum, July 7, 2009).

iv) **Terminology:** Hamas activists related to the theme chosen for the camps: **"Victory for Gaza, glory for Jerusalem."** They said it expressed the Gaza Strip's "victory" in Operation Cast Lead, which was "the first step toward **liberating Jerusalem and all Palestine.**" They said the name was meant to indoctrinate the children with the status of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa as places in need of "liberation." In addition, the camps were also named after Hamas *shaheeds* or names of places in Jerusalem, such as "the Dome of the Rock," "Jerusalem Road," "the defenders of Jerusalem," or names of topics on Hamas' current political agenda, such as "the camp for breaking the siege."

Semi-military training in the summer camps

7. In previous years participants in summer camps run by Hamas and the other terrorist organizations underwent semi-military training. Apparently Hamas is trying to keep a low profile regarding those activities, but nevertheless, this year as well, news agencies operating in the Gaza Strip published photographs of youths undergoing training. The **Safa** News Agency, whose head is affiliated with Hamas,¹ published photographs of adolescents wearing Hamas caps who were training with wooden and plastic assault rifles. Another news agency (demotix.com) published photographs of young men training at Hamas camps, including hand-to-hand combat.² The Fatah-affiliated Amad website criticized Hamas for allowing the use of weapons and holding target practice at the camps (June 2, 2009). The site quoted a parent who discovered last year that the children were practicing firing weapons and dismantling hand grenades, and this year decided not to send his son to a Hamas summer camp.

¹ The Safa News Agency has been operating in the Gaza Strip since the beginning of July 2009. It defines itself as independent but is headed by Yasser Abu Hien, who is affiliated with Hamas, and who in the past directed its PalMedia website.

² For pictures and a commentary in English see <http://www.demotix.com/news/hamas-summer-camps-gaza>.

**Youths training at a Hamas summer camp
(pictures from the Safa News Agency)**



Palestinian youths at a Hamas summer camp wearing green Hamas caps and training with wooden and plastic rifles. The banner at the upper right, hung on a building of typical school design, reads "Allah is our goal, [the] messenger [Muhammad] is our role model, the Qur'an is our law, jihad is our path and death [in jihad] for the sake of Allah is our most exalted hope"³ (Safa News Agency website, August 11, 2009).

³ The inscription was deciphered through the use of several pictures.

Examples of military training at earlier Hamas summer camps

2008



Youth undergoing military training at a summer camp, 2008. The wooden rifles and training were provided by operatives from Hamas' Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades.⁴

2004



Youth undergoing military training at a summer camp run by the Popular Resistance Committees (Sky News, July 13, 2004, used courtesy of Israeli Channel 2 TV).

⁴ For further information see our August 24, 2008 bulletin "Summer camps in the Gaza Strip run by Hamas and other terrorist organizations inculcate youngsters with radical Islamic ideology and the culture of terrorism" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hamas_e004.pdf.

The competition between Hamas and UNRWA for the hearts and minds of the youths

8. Hamas regards UNRWA as its main competitor in every aspect of using the summer camps to indoctrinate the younger generation of Gazans. UNRWA has several important advantages over Hamas, including its greater financial and logistic resources, and a broader base of educational institutions. As a result, **this past summer Hamas waged a determined mud-slinging campaign against UNRWA and its Gazan director, John Ging. Hamas represented them as corrupting the morals of Palestinian youth.** Hamas spokesmen, especially **Younis al-Astel**, a member of the Hamas faction of the Palestinian Legislative Council, repeatedly claimed that the UNRWA summer camps were coeducational, that drugs were used there and that the campers were taught how to dance, and that they even had activities to promote reconciliation between the Palestinians and Israel.⁵ The Hamas-affiliated Filastin al-'An website claimed (for purposes of psychological warfare) that the UNRWA summer camps spread disease (Filastin al-'An website, July 16, 2009).⁶

9. **The following are examples of the incitement campaign Hamas and other Islamist networks operating in the Gaza Strip are waging against the UNRWA summer camps:**

i) On August 2, at the closing ceremony of the summer camp in Rafah, **Younis al-Astel** repeatedly attacked the "barbaric attack on our children at the inferior summer camps [i.e., those run by UNRWA] whose objective is to corrupt their morals with drugs and other things..." (Website of the Hamas faction of the Palestinian Legislative Council, August 3, 2009).

ii) In the May 29 Friday sermon **in the Gaza mosques, the preachers focused on warning parents** not to send their children to UNRWA's summer camps. **Ahmed al-Safadi, one of the Salafist⁷ preachers at a mosque in Gaza City**, claimed that the UNRWA camps did not follow Islamic law because they "mixed the sexes." Another preacher called on parents to send their children only to "religious camps" where they would study the Qur'an and Islam (*Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, May 30, 2009).

⁵ For further information see our July 28, 2009 bulletin "The Islamization process promoted by Hamas in the Gaza Strip and its social and political implications on the local, the Middle Eastern, and the international scenes" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hamas_e076.pdf.

⁶ The Hamas campaign waged against UNRWA and its Gaza administrator John Ging for the hearts and minds of the Gazan youth is not limited to the summer camps. UNRWA has been accused by Hamas of corrupting the morals of the entire Palestinian people ("pollution" of the conservative, clean Palestinian society) through its educational institutions. See the aforementioned bulletin for further details.

⁷ **The Salafists** were the first generation of Islam, considered by Muslims and have taken the true path and as role models. In modern times it is a title given to extremist Islamic groups present throughout the Muslim world, including the Palestinian Authority.

iii) On July 12 a Fatah Internet forum reported that Hamas had distributed flyers in the mosques accusing UNRWA of “an attempt to corrupt the younger generation,” and that many preachers had called on parents not to allow their children to participate in UNRWA camps.

10. **Has UNRWA surrendered to Hamas pressure?** On July 8, 2009, surfers on a Hamas forum claimed that UNRWA had in fact surrendered to Hamas pressure and instructed its camp directors to fully separate boys from girls and male from female counselors. It is unclear whether and to what extent UNRWA did in fact adopt the Hamas’ Islamic behavior code in its camps, but in any case the camps it operated were **very successful**. **Karen Abu Ziyad**, UNRWA’s commissioner general for the Palestinian Authority, told an Al-Arabiya TV correspondent that there were between 200,000 and 250,000⁸ Gazan children at UNRWA camps this summer. [**Note:** That is far more than those attending Hamas camps.] UNRWA in turn has tried to deflect Hamas’ accusations. Karen Abu Ziyad denied the Hamas claim that UNRWA was using the camps to corrupt the younger generation and preach normalization with Israel. She said that the children played games and engaged in various cultural and sporting activities which “**have no relation to normalization** or anything like that” (Al-Arabiya TV website, July 26, 2009).

⁸ UNRWA spokesman **Jamad Hamad** said that UNRWA was running 145 summer camps, 119 of them in schools and the rest on the sea shore. He said that there were 200,000-250,000 campers this year (Al-Jazeera TV, July 21, 2009). The large number of participants indicated that despite Hamas’ incitement campaign, many young people, who prefer sports, games and folklore to political and Islamic indoctrination, and semi-military training flocked to UNRWA’s camps.