



UNRWA Exposed Another Tunnel Under One of The Schools It Operates in the Gaza Strip.

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Another Tunnel Exposed under an UNRWA School

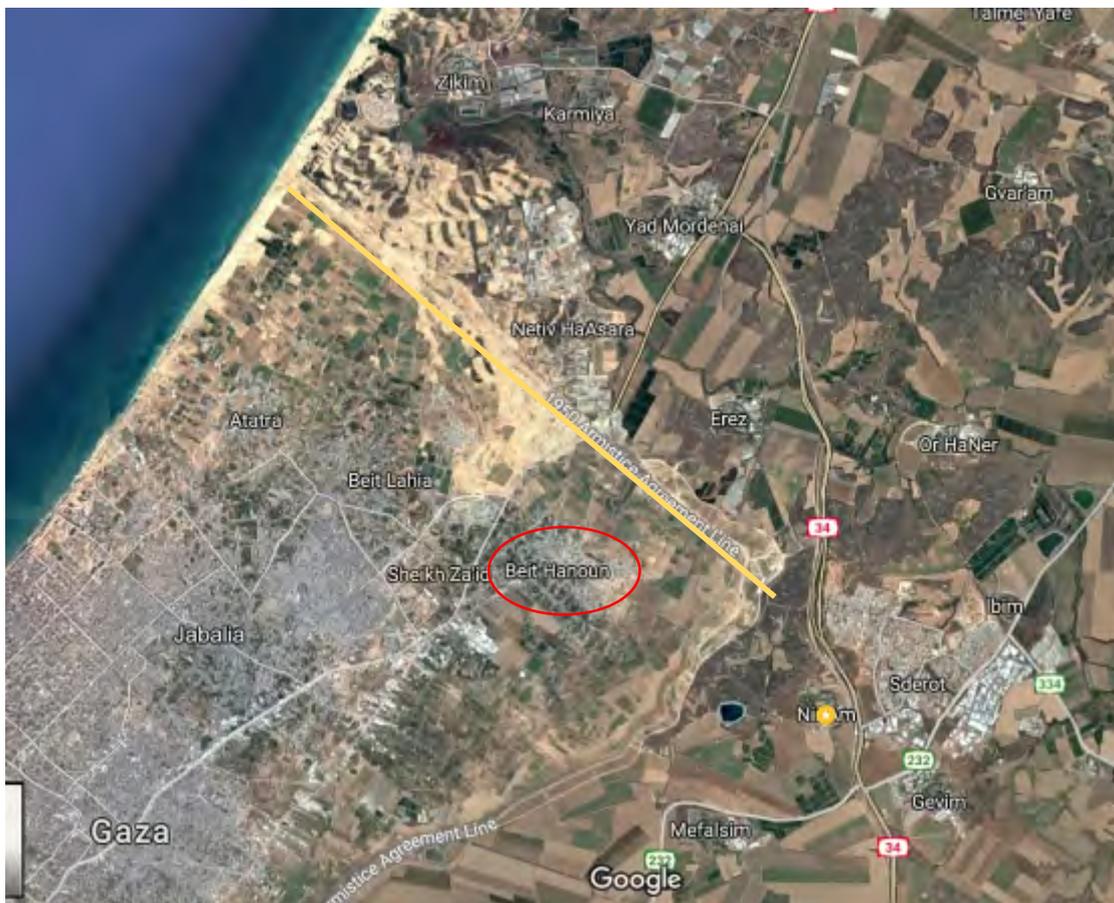
- ▶ On October 28, 2017, UNRWA Spokesperson Christopher Gunness, announced that on October 15, 2017, UNRWA **discovered the existence of what "appeared to be a tunnel underneath one of its schools in Gaza."** The name of the school was not mentioned. However, the announcement continued, "In accordance with its protocol, the Agency has taken the necessary measures immediately to render the school safe and has sealed the cavity underneath its premises. The school resumed its operations on the 25th of October."
- ▶ According to the announcement, "UNRWA...robustly **intervened with relevant parties to protest the violation of the sanctity and disrespect of the neutrality of UN premises.** The presence of a tunnel underneath an UNRWA installation...is unacceptable. **It places children and Agency staff at risk** [UNRWA website, October 28, 2017. ITIC emphasis throughout]."¹
- ▶ According to the Facebook page in Arabic of the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), the tunnel was found under the UNRWA boys' middle school in Beit Hanoun (northern Gaza Strip) (COGAT Arabic Facebook page, October 29, 2017). **Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanu' refused to respond to UNRWA's announcement**, saying authorized people in the Gaza Strip were examining the subject (Chinese news agency Xinhua, October 29, 2017).

¹ <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/unrwa-condemns-neutrality-violation-gaza>



The UNRWA boys' middle school in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip and the tunnel under it (COGAT Arabic Facebook page, October 29, 2017).

► **Beit Hanoun** is a very large town in the northern Gaza Strip close to the Israeli border. Because of its proximity to the border, **it has been used by the terrorist organizations, especially Hamas, as a convenient location for launching rockets and apparently for locating tunnels.**



Beit Hanoun (Google Maps).

UNRWA's Previous Exposure of a Tunnel

► It was not the first time UNRWA exposed a tunnel running under its schools. On June 9, 2017, an UNRWA spokesman reported finding a section of a tunnel **running under two of its schools in the al-Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip.**² Hamas rushed to issue a denial of everything concerning a tunnel under the schools. Hamas called it a violation of the neutrality of UN facilities. Hamas strongly criticized UNRWA for issuing the announcement and the ensuing media storm (Hamas website, June 9, 2017).

Uses Previously Made of Civilian Facilities by Terrorist Organizations in the Gaza Strip

► The terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, particularly Hamas, **customarily put civilian facilities to military use, including UNRWA installations. That was revealed many times in the past during IDF operations in the Gaza Strip.** The terrorist organizations use civilian facilities, such as schools, hospitals and mosques to hide weapons. They also situate terrorist operatives and headquarters in them, and launch rockets from locations close to civilian facilities. Hamas and the other terrorist organizations make military use of civilian facilities, including UNRWA schools, because they assume Israel will not attack them, and thereby they can increase the chances for survival of their operatives and weapons.

Summary and Evaluation

► **In principle, UNRWA opposes the military use Hamas and the other terrorist organizations make of the schools it operates in the Gaza Strip.** However, the agency's ability to stop them is limited, considering the position of power Hamas enjoys in the Gaza Strip, and the many advantages Hamas and the other terrorist organizations find in using UNRWA facilities for military purposes. Thus it can be assumed that **the terrorist organizations will continue using the facilities,** despite Hamas' denial.

► At this stage it is unclear to which terrorist organization the recently-exposed tunnel in Beit Hanoun belongs. In ITIC assessment, **it belongs to either Hamas or the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ),** the two terrorist organizations leading the construction of tunnels, including tunnels under Israel's border. They regard such tunnels as **strategic way to take**

² See the June 15, 2017 bulletin, "UNRWA reported the exposure of a tunnel under two of its school in the Gaza Strip; Hamas quickly issued a denial."

the fighting into Israeli territory, to be used for abductions and/or attacking Israeli targets. **Hassan Yusuf, a senior Hamas figure in Judea and Samaria**, recently said that the existence of the "resistance" in the Gaza Strip was justified, "underground and above ground" (Dunia al-Watan, October 29, 2017). The PIJ, whose tunnel into Israeli territory was blown up by the IDF on October 30, 2017, claimed **the tunnels were part of its anti-Israeli deterrent policy** (al-Aqsa, October 30, 2017).

The blowing up of the PIJ tunnel (October 30, 2017) and the exposure of the tunnel under an UNRWA school (October 15, 2017), **clearly illustrate the limitations of the Palestinian Authority's capabilities in the internal Palestinian reconciliation**. Hamas (and to a lesser extent, the PIJ) **can be expected to continue constructing tunnels, including those under the border and into Israeli territory**. Thus Hamas not only remains in charge of one of the key issues for the next round of fighting with Israel, it also obviates all of Mahmoud Abbas' influence over the sensitive issue of the tunnels.