



Hamas' strategic priority of military buildup over civilian infrastructure and population needs contributes greatly to the severe hardships in the Gaza Strip.

February 7, 2018

► Recently, the issue of **the severe economic situation of the Gaza Strip** became part of the Palestinian, Israeli and international agenda. The hardships are manifested by **the failing civilian infrastructure** (medicine, supply of electricity, water, sewage disposal) **and by the worsening of the quality of life of the Gazan population. The hardships of the population may lead to a deterioration of the situation on the ground.** Israel is often accused of responsibility for the hardships, but Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, is, to a great extent **responsible for the deterioration of the economic situation.**

One of the basic reasons behind the current situation, and which makes it difficult to rehabilitate the Gaza Strip, is, in ITIC assessment, **Hamas' strategic order of priorities.** Since Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip, **it has given priority to its military buildup at the expense of rehabilitating the civilian infrastructure and caring for the needs of the civilian population.** That is a **direct consequence of Hamas' overall strategy and ideology, and is not set to change in the foreseeable future.**

► In light of the above analysis, it is worthwhile to examine the statement made by Khaled Mashaal, who was chairman of Hamas' political bureau in November 2009 (about a year after Operation Cast Lead, when the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip became an item on the agenda). On November 12, 2009, Khaled Mashaal met with several senior figures at a political conference in Damascus. He shared with them (with fairly rare frankness) Hamas' worldview regarding its order of priorities. His main message was that **Hamas would continue the path of "resistance" [i.e., its military buildup] and therefore most of Hamas' funds and effort in the Gaza Strip would be directed towards military preparations.** His main points were the following (Filastin al-A'an website, November 12, 2009).¹

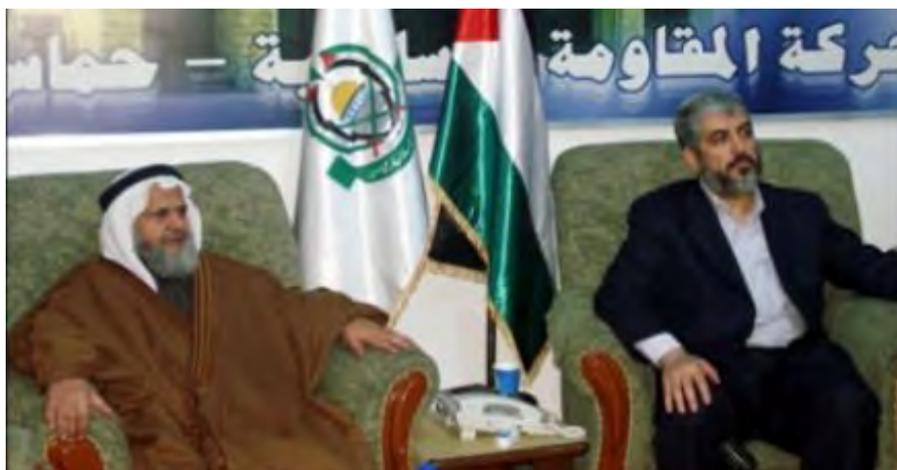
¹ For further information about what Khaled Mashaal said at the conference, see the August 3, 2014 bulletin, "Prioritization of Hamas' Military Buildup vs. the Gaza Strip's Civilian Needs: Hamas' genuine strategic priorities according to Khaled Mashaal, about a year after Operation Cast Lead." Also see the November 17, 2009 bulletin, "Khaled Mashaal makes it clear that Hamas is determined to continue the path of "resistance" (i.e., terrorism) and that "other statements are political maneuvers." He reveals that Hamas uses most of its financial resources in the Gaza Strip for military purposes rather than rebuilding."

- ◆ **Most of Hamas' efforts in the Gaza Strip are directed towards military preparations.** He said, "What is openly visible in the Gaza Strip is talk about the [internal Palestinian] reconciliation and construction; however, what is unseen is that **most of the funds and efforts are directed towards the 'resistance' and military preparations...We are hard at work on the 'resistance.'** "

وفيما يتعلق بغزة، قال مشعل "ظاهر الصورة في غزة أنهم يتحدثون عن المصالحة والبناء، لكن باطن الصورة يقول إن معظم المال والجهد يذهب للمقاومة والاستعدادات العسكرية" .. مؤكدا "نحن شغالين على المقاومة".

Khaled Mashaal's original statement.

- ◆ **Hamas, which has financial hardships, needs contributions for the "resistance."** Khaled Mashaal urged the Arab parties to **enlist donations** in preparation for the next stage of the "resistance" [i.e., the next round of confrontation in the Gaza Strip] **because Hamas was also "besieged" financially.** He warned against conditioning financial support for Hamas on the having the "resistance" carry out attacks, because, he said, **"the money is invested in preparations for escalating the 'resistance.'** "



Khaled Mashaal, head of Hamas' political bureau during a meeting of Arab political parties in Damascus where he told a number of senior figures that most of the money received by Hamas and most of its efforts were directed towards its military buildup (Filastin al-A'an, November 12, 2009).

Hamas' strategic priorities, as defined by Khaled Mashaal, **were in fact implemented during the years preceding Operation Protective Edge (2014).** The order of priorities **has continued to be implemented to this day.** Practically speaking, both money and resources (concrete, steel) destined for civilian projects have been diverted to Hamas military buildup, **particularly the tunnel and rocket projects.**

- ▶ Thus, in its day-to-day activities **Hamas does not hesitate to sacrifice the needs of the civilian population to its military buildup**. That was manifested in the kilometer-and-a-half (.93 miles) tunnel attacked by the IDF on January 14, 2018. The tunnel was dug from Rafah in the Gaza Strip to Rafah in Egypt, **crossing Israeli territory under the border security fence at the Kerem Shalom crossing, near the gas and oil pipelines that provide energy to the residents of the Gaza Strip**. A terrorist attack from the tunnel, had one been carried out, **would have endangered the activity of the Kerem Shalom crossing**. The crossing is the only entrance for merchandise into the Gaza Strip, and **through it tens of thousands of tons of merchandise pass on a daily basis**. Carrying out a terrorist attack through the tunnel would have struck a blow to the Gaza Strip's energy supply.
- ▶ Another concrete example of the priority Hamas gives to military considerations was the exposure of Hamas' attempt to smuggle materials for the manufacture of explosives in boxes of medical equipment, while the hospitals in the Gaza Strip suffer from a lack of medical equipment.



Right: Tunnel attacked by the IDF, whose route passed under the Kerem Shalom crossing. The crossing is the main point for passage the thousands of tons of food, medical equipment and building materials for the residents of the Gaza Strip. Left: The route of the tunnel from the Gaza Strip to Egypt through Israeli territory under the Kerem Shalom crossing (Facebook page of the IDF spokesperson, January 14, 2018)



Boxes containing materials for the manufacture of explosives hidden in a shipment of medical equipment for the Gaza Strip (Israeli ministry of defense spokesman's unit).