



The killing of Palestinian press photographer Yasser Murtaja by the IDF during the events of the Great March of Return highlighted a phenomenon of operatives of Hamas employed as media personnel

April 10, 2018

The death of Yasser Murtaja in the Great March of Return

► **Yasser Abdul Rahman Murtaja** was a 30-year-old Palestinian press photographer and cofounder of the Ain Media production company. On April 6, 2018, Murtaja was wounded by IDF gunfire while filming the violent clashes between Palestinian demonstrators and IDF forces a few hundred meters from the border fence (in the Ikhza'a area in the southern Gaza Strip). He died of his wounds on April 7, 2018.



The last photo taken of Yasser Abdul Murtaja before his death, published by the Ain Media Agency in Gaza. The picture shows the clouds of black smoke rising from the burning tires in the area, with Murtaja standing close to the demonstrators (Facebook page of the Ain Media Agency, April 8, 2018)

According to Israeli security sources, **press photographer Yasser Murtaja was a Hamas operative**. According to the same sources, **he served for years as an officer with the rank of captain in the Hamas security services in the Gaza Strip**. The same sources added, based on information that they possess, **that he was an operative who was active in the security services on a daily basis and greatly assisted them in their activity**. The same security sources added that in March 2015, Murtaja attempted to bring a drone from Israel to the Gaza Strip to collect preliminary intelligence before operations by the Hamas security

services. Of late, Yasser Murtaja continued to work with senior Hamas internal security officials in the Gaza Strip, **many of whom made condolence calls at his family's home** (Walla News website, article by Amir Bohbot, April 10, 2018).



Senior Hamas police officials in the Gaza Strip, headed by Police Commissioner Taysir al-Batsh (right), making a condolence call (Gaza Police website, April 8, 2018)

► **The death of Yasser Murtaja was exploited by Hamas and the Palestinians for a propaganda campaign against Israel, in complete disregard of his affiliation with Hamas.** On April 8, 2018, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate (PJS) held a demonstration in front of the UN headquarters in Gaza City, denouncing Israel's so-called aggression towards journalists. **Tahseen al-Astal**, a member of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, accused Israel of shooting at journalists for no reason and called on the UN secretary general to protect the lives of Palestinian journalists from Israel's so-called crimes (Al-Wataniya channel, April 8, 2018). **Salameh Maaruf, a Hamas operative who heads the government information bureau in Gaza, published information whose reliability is not clear.** According to the data published, since the start of the Great March of Return activities, 40 journalists have been injured by the IDF: 13 from live ammunition, two from gas grenades and the remaining 25 from smoke inhalation (Anatolia News Agency, April 7, 2018).

Employing terrorist operatives as media personnel as was the case in Operation Protective Edge

► **Yasser Murtaja's double role as media man and a Hamas operative is part of a well-known phenomenon** that was exposed after Operation Protective Edge. As part of a project examining the names of the Palestinians killed in Operation Protective Edge, **the ITIC**

examined a list of 17 people killed in the operation who the Palestinians claimed were journalists.

► A thorough examination of the list revealed that **eight of the 17 names were operatives who belonged to Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), or who were journalists who worked for the Hamas media network.** The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate and the Gaza branch of the Palestinian Information Ministry, which were behind the list (and which are now participating in the anti-Israeli campaign following the death of Yasser Murtaja), **attempted to conceal the military identity of the “journalists” and presented them as media personnel for all intents and purposes¹.**

► Moreover, the findings of the examination revealed that **only about a third of the journalists/media personnel who appeared on the list were killed in Operation Protective Edge while covering events on the battlefield as part of their journalistic assignments.** The rest were killed during the fighting in the Gaza Strip under circumstances unrelated to their journalistic work. The investigation also revealed that **at least two members of the media on the list were not killed by the IDF** and that their inclusion in the list of those killed (allegedly by the IDF) **is misleading** (the two people involved were an AP photographer and his interpreter, who were killed in a “work accident” during a ceasefire while covering the dismantling of duds by Palestinian policemen).

The conclusion of the examination conducted by the ITIC after Operation Protective Edge was that the list of **“the 17 journalists who were killed” was a manipulative list** designed to support the false claim that Israel had deliberately killed a large number of journalists, thereby committing a “war crime” (for which the Palestinians demanded that the “murderers” be brought to trial in international courts). All this was **part of the tactics of deception and deceit carried out by Hamas and its affiliated bodies on the lists of Palestinians killed in Operation Protective Edge, as part of the political, propaganda and lawfare campaign against the State of Israel.** The campaign currently being waged in the case of Yasser Murtaja is **a current manifestation of these tactics.**

¹ For further information, see the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from February 11, 2015: “Examination of the Names of 17 Journalists and Media Personnel whom the Palestinians claim were killed in Operation Protective Edge (Update No. 8)” <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/20771>

Abdullah Murtaja, a Hamas media man and military operative who was killed in Operation Protective Edge (a member of the same clan as Yasser Murtaja)²



Abdullah Murtaja, member of the military information unit of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, appearing in a video reading his will. After reading his will, Abdullah Murtaja notes that he belonged to the Shejaiya Battalion (the Gaza City Brigade) of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades (YouTube, October 30, 2014). A document published by the Palestinian Ministry of Information did not mention Murtaja’s military identity and claimed that he was a journalist who worked at civilian media companies. Murtaja’s name was included on the list of 17 journalists that the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate claimed had been killed in Operation Protective Edge.



Right: Abdullah Murtaja, who is described as “a fallen Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades media operative” (Al-Shahid al-Qassami al-I’lami), reading his will (YouTube, October 30, 2014). Left: Abdullah Murtaja carrying out media activity as a correspondent for Hamas’s Al-Aqsa Channel (YouTube, December 12, 2013).

² Additional examples of terrorist operatives who also served as journalists and media personnel appear in the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from February 11, 2015.



On October 7, 2014, Yaser Murtaja (who was killed during the events of the Great March of Return) shared a post on Facebook showing a photo of Abdullah Fadel Murtaja in the uniform of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades. The post reads: “Allah have mercy on you, commando operative, we miss your smile” (Yasser Murtaja’s Facebook page, October 7, 2014)