



Iranian support for Palestinian terrorism: Continuation of Iranian fund transfers to shaheeds' families in the Gaza Strip by PIJ-affiliated Al-Ansar charity association

August 2 , 2018

Overview

► The Al-Ansar charity association in the Gaza Strip, which is affiliated with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), announced that it had distributed this year **financial support for families of shaheeds** killed in the years 2000-2014. **A total of \$1,870,000 was distributed this year** (compared to \$2 million in 2017). The funds were transferred to the Al-Ansar association by **the Iranian Martyrs Foundation**, used by the Iranians as a channel to transfer funds earmarked for social activities supporting terrorism. The aid was transferred to **4,800 beneficiaries**. Residents of the Gaza Strip, representatives of the shaheeds' families, were supposed to arrive in the offices of the Al-Ansar association **and receive checks to be cashed in the Hamas-controlled Islamic National Bank, which has been outlawed by the Palestinian Authority (PA)**.



Logo of the Al-Ansar charity association in the Gaza Strip, which is used as a channel for Iranian fund transfers to the Gaza Strip for social activities supporting terrorism (Facebook page of the Al-Ansar charity association, January 18, 2015)

► Following Al-Ansar's announcement, many Gazans posted on the Facebook page of the association questions addressed to the Al-Ansar charity association. Careful reading of about 180 questions reveals that **this year, there were difficulties transferring the funds to the shaheeds' families**. These difficulties consisted of delays in the transfer, a decrease in the amount transferred to each family, and the reduction of about 6.5% from the total of the

overall support. Furthermore, so far, families of those killed in Operation Protective Edge have not yet received the aid funds. In the ITIC's assessment, it is possible that the difficulties originate **in the economic crisis suffered by Iran and the uproar that has surfaced in popular protest rallies in Iran** due to the financial support extended to the Palestinians and other groups outside Iran.

► The financial support serves for Iran as **a means to increase its influence on the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip** while conveying a message to the Arab and Sunni-Muslim world that Iran supports the Palestinian struggle against Israel. **Following are some details on the institutions involved in transferring the funds from Iran to the Gaza Strip through Lebanon:**

◆ **The Iranian Martyrs Foundation was established by Imam Khomeini** in order to support the families of those killed in the Iran-Iraq War. **The foundation has a Lebanese branch supporting Hezbollah, and a Palestinian branch, operating from Lebanon**, which transfers funds to the Gaza Strip and had previously also transferred funds to Judea and Samaria. **The PIJ-affiliated Al-Ansar association is an executive wing of sorts of the Iranian Martyrs Foundation in the Gaza Strip** and serves for it as **a channel for transferring funds to the Gaza Strip through Lebanon**. The Iranian Martyrs Foundation and its branches in Lebanon were designated by the United States Department of the Treasury (2007) as foundations supporting terrorist organizations because they provide financial assistance to Hezbollah, Hamas, and the PIJ.

◆ **The Al-Ansar charity association**, operating in the Gaza Strip, **is affiliated with the PIJ**. The association was founded during the Second Intifada (2001) and is used by the Iranians as a channel for transferring funds mainly intended for social activities supporting terrorism. In Israel, the Al-Ansar association was outlawed in 2003. However, it resumed its activity after Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip.

◆ **The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)**, with which the Al-Ansar association is affiliated, **is the second most important terrorist organization in the Gaza Strip after Hamas**. **It has the closest ties with Iran** and receives military and financial support from it. Based on past experience, it should be taken into account that **funds transferred for social activities may also “spill over” to the PIJ's military infrastructure** although these are “charity funds” (in the past, Imam Khomeini gave its approval to the transfer of Muslim “charity funds” to support the Palestinians).

◆ **Islamic National Bank:** This bank was established in the Gaza Strip **by the Hamas administration** in November 2008. The bank has four branches in the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Authority does not recognize the bank and outlawed it. The United States Department of the Treasury designated it (2010) as a terrorist organization **because it is controlled by Hamas and provides financial services to its military operatives and employees.** During Operation Protective Edge, the branches of the bank in western Gaza City and in Khan Younes were attacked by the Israeli Air Force because this is a Hamas institution which transfers funds for terrorist activity. Two years before, during Operation Pillar of Defense, the bank branch in Gaza was attacked.

Distribution of funds to shaheeds' families in the Gaza Strip

- ▶ On July 24, 2018, the Al-Ansar charity association published a notice for the Gaza Strip residents on the distribution of the support funds to the shaheeds' families in the Gaza Strip, based on funding by the Palestinian branch of the Iranian Martyrs Foundation. According to the notice, the aid currently distributed **is limited to families of shaheeds killed since the beginning of the Second Intifada** (“Al-Aqsa Intifada”) **until June 31 (sic), 2014** (about one month before Operation Protective Edge).¹
- ▶ The Al-Ansar association made it clear that there were **4,800 beneficiaries** on its lists. The aid was supposed to be provided **by the Islamic National Bank, and representatives of the shaheeds' families had to arrive at that bank to cash their checks**². According to the notice, only first-degree relatives of the shaheeds **should arrive in the offices of the Al-Ansar charity association in the Gaza Strip**, on July 25 – August 2, 2018, to receive the pension in the days fixed according to their places of residence (Facebook page of the Al-Ansar charity association, July 24, 2018).

¹ June has 30 days. All the notice ITIC decided to leave this date.

² The Al-Ansar's notice reads “t “Islamic National Bank” was m



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The notice on the distribution of aid to families of those killed since the beginning of the intifada until June 31, 2014 (Facebook page of the Al-Ansar charity association, July 24, 2018)

Gazans' questions and Al-Ansar's replies through Facebook

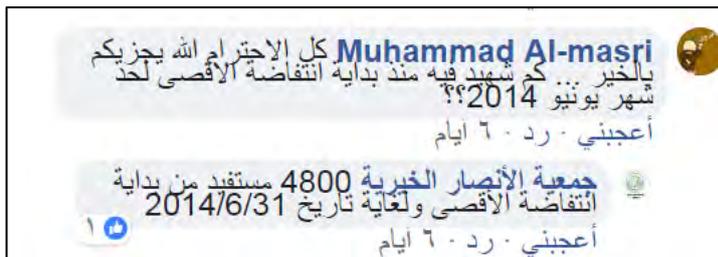
► Following the association's notice, internet users inundated the association's Facebook page with questions. Answers given by the association managers to users' questions (about 180 questions) reveal the scope of the financial support, who is eligible for it, difficulties in the transfer, and the manner of distribution. Following are some of the topics raised (Facebook page of the Al-Ansar charity association, July 24, 2018):

◆ **Who is eligible for the support?** According to the notice, the support is given to families of shaheeds who were killed **since the beginning of the Second Intifada ("Al-Aqsa Intifada") until June 31, 2014**. The funds are intended for families of those killed **in the Gaza Strip only**. Wounded are not included among the beneficiaries.

◆ **Who is not eligible for the support?**

- **Those killed in Operation Protective Edge:** Answers to Gazans' questions reveal that families of those killed in Operation Protective Edge are not included in the distribution. It was explained that those families were not included **because funds for them (i.e., funds originating in Iran) had not arrived yet**. The website managers expressed their hope that **the support for those families would arrive soon**. One of the Gazans complained that families of those killed in Operation Protective Edge, who are supposed to receive support once a year, **had not received funds since Ramadan 2017** (i.e., late May-late June 2017).

- **Those killed [in the year] 2017 (it is unclear who is intended by that):** A Gazan who asked “when [would the support] for those killed in 2017 [arrive]?” was answered, “**We don’t know... When the support is found... It is a difficult situation.**”
- **What is the status of those killed in the confrontations between Fatah and Hamas in 2007?**³ In an answer to a Gazan’s question it was explained that those are not included in the lists – only those who are described as shaheeds as a result of the “Israeli occupation.”
- **Those killed in the “Return March:”** They are not included in the lists.
- ◆ **The amounts of money to which the families are entitled:** In an answer to Gazans’ questions about the amounts of money that the families are supposed to receive, the association clarified that **the family of a married shaheed would receive \$600; of an unmarried shaheed – \$300; and the family of a married woman who was killed would receive only \$150. After several Gazans complained that in the past, they received \$600 for an unmarried shaheed, it was clarified on behalf of the association that providing this amount had been canceled by the association and that this year, families of single shaheeds would receive only \$300.**



Examples of Gazans’ questions and Al-Ansar’s replies
(Facebook page of the Al-Ansar charity association, July 24, 2018)

³ A series of violent confrontations between Fatah and Hamas in the Gaza Strip during the years 2006-2007, which ended by Hamas taking over the Gaza Strip in June 2017.

Distribution of funds in previous years

► Following up on the distribution of Iranian support funds by the Al-Ansar charity association during the past three years, the ITIC has learned that each year, funds are being distributed to families of shaheeds killed from the beginning of the Second Intifada until June 31, 2014, **a total amount of about \$2 million** (this year, there has been a decrease of 6.5% in the amount of the support compared to last year). In addition, in the past, funds were also distributed to families of those killed in Operation Protective Edge and in the popular terrorism in Judea and Samaria (“Al-Quds Intifada”). **These funds are transferred to the Gaza Strip by the Palestinian branch of the Iranian Martyrs Foundation, operating in Lebanon.** The Al-Ansar association, which is affiliated with the PIJ, is the only institution through which Iranian support funds are funneled to shaheeds’ families in the Gaza Strip.

► Following are examples of fund transfers in the past three years:

- ◆ **On May 21, 2017**, the Al-Ansar charity association and the Palestinian branch of the Iranian Martyrs Foundation announced the grant of financial support for families of shaheeds killed since the beginning of the Second Intifada (“Al-Aqsa Intifada”) until June 31, 2014 (about a month before Operation Protective Edge). **The amount of support transferred was \$2 million.**

- ◆ **During the first half of June 2016**, funds were distributed to families whose sons were killed since the beginning of the Second Intifada until June 31, 2014 (website of the Al-Ansar charity association, May 31, 2016). **In an interview to the Iranian Al-Alam TV channel**, Abu Khaled (apparently Nasser al-Sheikh Ali, deputy chairman of the Al-Ansar association and probably also its spokesman) **thanked the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Iranian leadership for the support** (Iranian Al-Alam TV channel, July 2, 2016).

- ◆ **During June 2016**, the Al-Ansar charity association distributed financial support to families of shaheeds killed during Operation Protective Edge. The support distributed to the families included, according to the association’s notice, 1,630 people in the first phase. **The amount distributed during that phase was estimated at \$631,000** (Al-Wataniya News Agency, June 25, 2016).

- ◆ **On February 24, 2016**, at the peak of the popular terrorism in Judea and Samaria, the Iranian ambassador to Lebanon announced during a press conference that he held in the Iranian Embassy in Beirut that Iran intended to transfer financial support to the

“Al-Quds Intifada” (the name given by Hamas to the wave of popular terrorism in Judea and Samaria). He noted that **the support provided would be \$7,000 for each shaheed’s family, and \$30,000 for each family whose house was destroyed by Israel.** It is unclear how and when the funds were transferred.

◆ **On April 12, 2015,** the Al-Ansar charity association announced the distribution of financial support in the amount of **\$2 million to 5,000 shaheeds’ families** whose sons were killed since the beginning of the Second Intifada until June 31, 2014. The support was transferred by the Palestinian branch of the Iranian Martyrs Foundation (website of the Al-Ansar association, April 12, 2015; Facebook page of the Al-Ansar association, April 5, 2015).⁴

◆ **On January 18, 2015,** the Al-Ansar association appealed to residents of the Gaza Strip whose sons were killed during Operation Protective Edge asking them to present the relevant documents to arrange for the transfer of the financial support for them by the Iranian Martyr Foundation. The payment for each family was about \$400 (to some 2,200 families). The total support of the Iranian Martyrs Foundation was supposed to **amount to about \$900,000.**

The Islamic National Bank



**Logo of the Islamic National Bank of Gaza
(Facebook page of the Islamic National Bank, September 29, 2016)**

⁴ For details, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from April 30, 2015: “Iranian Support for Palestinian Terrorism: Funds Transferred to Gazan Shaheeds' Families by Palestinian Islamic Jihad-Affiliated Al-Ansar Charity Association.”

Transfer of funds to shaheeds' families by the Islamic National Bank

► Several Gazans asked the Al-Ansar charity association which bank would the funds intended for shaheeds' families be transferred to. **The Al-Ansar charity association's answer was that the funds would arrive in the Islamic National Bank and be distributed by it** (Facebook page of the Al-Ansar charity association, July 24, 2018).



Questions on the Facebook page of the Al-Ansar charity association regarding the bank to which the funds will arrive. Right: A Gazan's question: "To what bank, brother?" The Al-Ansar charity's answer: "Islamic National Bank." Left: A Gazan's question: "From what bank is the support?" The Al-Ansar association's reply: "Islamic National Bank"
(Facebook page of the Al-Ansar charity association, July 24, 2018)

The establishment of the bank and some basic information

► **The Islamic National Bank was established in the Gaza Strip in accordance with the Hamas government's decision from November 2008, and was officially opened in April 2009.** The main reason for establishing the bank was **the Palestine Monetary Authority's decision to ban Hamas's administration, institutions and officials.** In December 2006, Ismail Haniya, head of the Hamas government at the time, visited Qatar. During the visit, the issue of an Islamic bank in the Gaza Strip was raised. **Its initial funding was \$50 million** (Hamas website, December 3, 2006). When it was opened, the bank management declared that it was operating in accordance with Islamic principles and had sharia (Islamic religious law) backing from clerics in the Gaza Strip, who encouraged the residents to open accounts in the new bank (BBC, March 23, 2009).

► **The bank has four branches in the Gaza Strip:** Two branches in Gaza City, a branch in Khan Younes and a branch in Rafah. The chairman of the bank's board of directors is **Dr. Ibrahim Salem Jaber.** According to the bank report from 2017, **the total of its deposits amounted to \$86 million.** In comparison, in 2010, the total was \$34 million (website of the Islamic National Bank of Gaza, August 2, 2018).

Bank declared illegal by the Palestinian Authority

- ▶ The bank has no clearing and working relations with other banks in the Palestinian Authority. This is because the Palestine Monetary Authority (PMA) does not recognize it as it was established by a decision of Hamas's government in the Gaza Strip (Al-Muslim website, May 5, 2009). The bank has no license on behalf of the Palestinian Authority and does not appear on the list of authorized banks on the PA's website (rijock.blogspot.com).
- ▶ The Islamic National Bank operates without the authorization of the Palestine Monetary Authority, which was established as part of the Oslo Accords in 1993 to monitor the monetary system in Judea and Samaria and in the Gaza Strip. Since the bank is not approved by the PA, it can only operate in the Gaza Strip, without any relations with Israeli or international banks (Electronicintifada.net, October 29, 2013).
- ▶ On March 21, 2011, the Palestine Monetary Authority published an **official announcement informing the entire Palestinian public that the Islamic National Bank of Gaza is not authorized and is illegal**. The announcement warned the public not to cooperate with it (website of the Palestine Monetary Authority in Ramallah, March 21, 2011).



The warning published by the Palestine Monetary Authority (website of the Palestine Monetary Authority in Ramallah, March 21, 2011)

Designation of the bank as a terrorist organization by the US administration and lack of international connections

- ▶ The bank is not connected to the global banking system. A search in the SWIFT website, serving the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, reveals that the bank is not a member of SWIFT (rijock.blogspot.com).
- ▶ On March 18, 2010, the **United States Department of the Treasury designated the Hamas-controlled Islamic National Bank in the Gaza Strip a terrorist organization and**

such that provides financial services to Hamas operatives and the employees of the Hamas administration, including members of its military wing (website of the US Department of the Treasury, March 18, 2010).

Terrorist target

► Owing to its being a Hamas official institution transferring funds earmarked for terrorist activity, **during Operation Protective Edge (2014), Israeli aircraft attacked the bank branch in western Gaza City and the branch in Khan Younes.** The branches sustained damage. Two years earlier, **in November 2012, during Operation Pillar of Defense (November 20, 2012), the IDF attacked the bank branch in Gaza City.**