



Hamas continues military training for students in government high schools in the Gaza Strip to prepare them to join its ranks

November 29, 2018

Overview

During 2018 Hamas has continued providing military training for students in government high schools in the Gaza Strip, with the "return marches" and ongoing tension with Israel in the background. The training is part of the *al-Futuwwa* ("youth/heroism") program, which prepares them to join the ranks of Hamas (and other terrorist organizations) in the future. The government schools in the Gaza Strip are technically subordinate to the ministry of education of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in Ramallah, but in reality **Hamas controls the operation of the system of education in the Gaza Strip.**



Al-Futuwwa activities in a school in the central Gaza Strip (Facebook page of the national security apparatus in the Gaza Strip, November 24, 2018).

- ▶ Al-Futuwwa military instruction and training are generally provided by officers in the national security forces, which belong to the Hamas-controlled ministry of the interior in the Gaza Strip. **The students are given basic military skills**, including theoretical and practical training using guns. They are also given practical activity in the field, and are incorporated into the ongoing security activities of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military-terrorist wing.
- ▶ **Al-Futuwwa is part of more extensive ideological and practical Hamas program for young children, adolescents and university students in the Gaza Strip.** It begins in kindergarten and ends in university, **to foster a cadre of military and political operatives**

from the younger generation and to inculcate them with Hamas' ideology ("the liberation of Palestine," refusal to recognize the existence of the State of Israel, adherence to the path of jihad, the tenets of radical Islamism). **Hamas intends to have them join the armed struggle against Israel and in the future to participate in its political and military activities.** Thus during the "return marches" the presence of adolescent Gazans was prominent. They risked their lives in riots at the security fence by carrying out violent activities against IDF soldiers, dispatched or encouraged by Hamas.¹

The al-Futuwwa Program in High Schools in the Central Gaza Strip, 2018

► On November 22 and 24, 2018, the Facebook page of the national security apparatus in the Gaza Strip posted the following notice: "Some of the military lectures given to high school students about the use weapons and [gaining] skills [in using them] **were organized by the al-Futuwwa program in schools in the central Gaza Strip and western Khan Yunis.**" Two schools in Rafah were mentioned, one named for Hamas founder Ahmed Yassin and the other for PIJ founder Fathi Shqaqi, both run by Hamas. **Several pictures were posted of the military activities carried out in the schools as part of the program.** The pictures show the instructors are **operatives wearing uniforms of the Hamas-controlled national security apparatus.**



High school students in Rafah in military drills (Facebook page of the national security apparatus in the Gaza Strip, November 22, 2018).

¹ For further information, see the August 9, 2018 bulletin, "Video published by the organizers of the 'return marches' shows Gazan youths sent into Israeli territory and entering an abandoned IDF post, knowingly risking their lives.



Al-Futuwwa activity in high schools in the central Gaza Strip and Western Khan Yunis (Facebook page of the national security apparatus in the Gaza Strip, November 24, 2018).



Al-Futuwwa lecture on the AK-12 (a Russian assault rifle) given by a uniformed operative (Facebook page of the national security apparatus in the Gaza Strip, November 24, 2018).

The al-Futuwwa Program and Its Objectives

► **The al-Futuwwa program was introduced into the school curriculum by Hamas in 2012.** Since then it has given **tens of thousands of students theoretical and practical military training.** The program is implemented in many of the Hamas-controlled schools in the Gaza Strip. As opposed to Hamas' summer camps, where participation is voluntary,² **al-Futuwwa is required as part of the curriculum.** The teachers are officers in national security apparatus which are subordinate to the Hamas-controlled ministry of the interior. According to educational personnel in the Hamas administration, **the objective of the program is to train students in combat skills so they will be able to resist the**

² For further information, see the July 18, 2018, bulletin, "Hamas announced the opening of summer camps for children and adolescents in the Gaza Strip. This year summer camps are inspired by the 'return marches,' and include military training as they do every year."

"occupation" and to create a new generation of Palestinian youth capable of liberating and defending their land (al-Ra'i and Filastin al-A'an, January 7, 2014).³

► The students are given military and paramilitary training in topics such as basic skills, field skills, commando training, urban warfare, self-defense and civil defense, and physical training. **The program has three basic components:**

- ◆ **Weekly military lessons** given inside the school throughout the school year. Most of the instructors are operatives of the Hamas-controlled security apparatus operating in the Gaza Strip.



Right: An al-Futuwwa student in the Gamal Abdel Nasser school receives an award from senior figures in the Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip (Dunia al-Watan, April 4, 2013). Left: An officer in Hamas' security apparatus teaches students about weapons in an al-Futuwwa lesson in a school in the northern Gaza Strip (al-Futuwwa Facebook page, March 26, 2013).

- ◆ **Concentrated six-day training courses** held in training camps. The courses are held during vacations and sometimes in the school itself (al-Aqsa TV, January 7, 2014).

³ For further information about the program, see the May 8, 2013 bulletin, "Hamas has introduced a program in Gaza Strip schools called Al-Futuwwa, which provides military training for tens of thousands of adolescent boys. Its objective is to raise a new generation of Hamas operatives and supporters, and to ensure Hamas' future control of the Gaza Strip."



Al-Futuwwa students simulate an attack on an IDF post and the abduction of an IDF soldier (al-Futuwwa Facebook page, March 28, 2013).



Al-Futuwwa students practice with live ammunition in a simulation of storming and taking control of an IDF post (al-Futuwwa Facebook page. March 26, 2013).

- ◆ **Practical activity on the ground**, which includes **incorporating students in the security activities of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing** (such as night patrols, securing junctions and key points, and manning roadblocks).

The al-Futuwwa program clearly illustrates how Hamas exploits its control over the educational system in the Gaza Strip to promote its own interests. The ministry of education in the Gaza Strip is (theoretically) subordinate to the PA ministry of education in Ramallah, which operates it. **However, in reality, the PA has no practical influence over how the schools in the Gaza Strip, supervised by Hamas, are run.**⁴ In 2014, **Ziyad Thabet**, deputy minister of education in the Gaza Strip (a position he still holds), said they did have a connection with the minister of education in the national consensus government [in Ramallah] but **it was weak and impractical.** He added that the Palestinian minister of education in Ramallah did not support the ministry in the Gaza Strip in running the schools on a day-to-day basis or in allotting funds. He complained that the employees of the ministry in the Gaza Strip did not receive salaries from the [PA] government in Ramallah and that his ministry had to cancel a large number of programs because of lack of funding (website of the ministry of education in Gaza, July 2, 2014).

⁴ The ITIC has no indications about criticism from Hamas of the PA against military training in schools. In 2012, when the program was introduced, there was criticism from a senior figure in an NGO operating in the Gaza Strip: **Samir Zaqout, head of field research of the al-Meidan Center in the Gaza Strip**, strongly criticized the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip for introducing al-Futuwwa in the high schools in the Gaza Strip. He called it "**a program empty of substance and with no added educational value.**" He added that first the Hamas government had to solve the more important problems in Palestinian education in the Gaza Strip and to teach educational values and messages in different ways (MBC TV, Dubai, November 12, 2012).