



Terrorism and the Media: Hamas operatives in the Gaza Strip who also worked as media personnel were involved in recruiting a terrorist network exposed in Judea and Samaria.

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Overview

The Israel Security Agency recently exposed a Hamas network in Judea and Samaria whose operatives were recruited and handled by Hamas operatives in the Gaza Strip. The recruits were given instructions to carry out terrorist attacks in Judea, Samaria and Israel. Interrogation revealed the methods used by the handlers in the Gaza Strip. The recruiters represented themselves as journalists, and covert messages were passed to the recruits through al-Aqsa TV, Hamas' most important media outlet (in order to verify the authenticity of their handlers in the Gaza Strip).

► The Israel Security Agency report mentioned the names of four media personnel in the Gaza Strip who were involved in Hamas' recruiting and handling the operatives in Judea and Samaria. The ITIC examined their names and roles: one was identified as a correspondent for Hamas' organ al-Risalah, who customarily covers the "return marches;" another was a Hamas operative who often photographed "return march" events and the activities of the night harassment unit; another was a broadcaster and director of foreign relations for Hamas' al-Aqsa TV, who sent covert messages to one of the recruited terrorists in Judea and Samaria during his broadcasts; and the final one was a long-standing al-Aqsa TV broadcaster who referred to himself as a "disciple" of Yahya Ayyash (known as "the engineer," who was behind a wave of deadly terrorist attacks against Israel).

► **The double identities of Palestinian media personnel who are also involved in terrorism is well known from past events.** There is also a well-known phenomenon of terrorist operatives making use of indications of media affiliation. That is done to increase their chances of survival in violent events such as the "return marches" and in fighting arenas (by wearing Press vests or using media vehicles). The Appendices give past examples of the use Hamas and the other terrorist organizations made of indications of media affiliation.

Using indications of media affiliation **increases the likelihood of survival** by exploiting the protection afforded to journalists. Hamas and the other terrorist organizations are well aware that the IDF is as careful as possible not to harm media correspondents. **However, the exploitation of the indications of media affiliation by terrorist organizations endangers the lives of authentic media personnel operating in violent events and fighting arenas.**

Using Hamas Media Personnel and al-Aqsa TV to Recruit Operatives in Judea and Samaria

Overview

During the past two months the Israel Security Agency exposed attempts made by a covert Hamas unit in the Gaza Strip to **recruit Palestinians from Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem**. In recent years dozens of young Palestinians from Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem, some of them women, have been detained who **were in contact with Hamas operatives in the Gaza Strip**. They were instructed to carry out terrorist attacks in **Judea, Samaria and Israel** (including a suicide bombing attack in the central Israeli city of Lod).

► A number of operatives who were detained **revealed the methods by which they were recruited and handled by Hamas in the Gaza Strip**. They said the first contact was made through Facebook. Some of the Hamas recruiters in the Gaza Strip **represented themselves as journalists** and messages were transmitted to recruits in Judea and Samaria by **Hamas' al-Aqsa TV broadcasts**.

Operatives who were detained in Judea and Samaria recruited by Hamas in the Gaza Strip

► The following are names of operatives who were detained and information gained from interrogation (Israel Security Agency website, February 13, 2019):

- ◆ **Qutaiba al-Nawaja'**, 21, from the village of Yatta, detained for interrogation in December 2018. **The previous year he began communicating on Facebook with Muhammad al-'Arabid, a Hamas operative in the Gaza Strip** (see below). Al-Nawaja' thought al-'Arabid was a journalist because during one of the events at the border **he was photographed wearing a Press vest**. In November 2018 al-'Arabid introduced al-

Nawaja' to an operative who represented himself as belonging to Hamas' military wing. He was asked to carry out terrorist attacks including **a suicide bombing attack using an explosive belt in the Israeli city of Lod. He was detained a few days before he was supposed to receive the explosive belt for the attack.**

◆ **Bahaa Shujaiah**, 21, from the village of Deir Jarir (northeast of Ramallah), a student in the religion department of Abu Dis University. He was detained for interrogation on December 16, 2018. **He headed a covert Hamas-affiliated student cell at the university.** In the past he was convicted of membership in a terrorist squad recruited by Hamas in the Gaza Strip **to carry out suicide bombing attacks and shooting attacks in Israel.** In May 2018 he was released from an Israeli jail after serving a term of two years. A few months later he was contacted on Facebook by **Musa Alian, a Hamas operative from Jabalia who represented himself as a journalist**, and suggested Shujaiah participate in a military activity (See below).

◆ **Ahmed Abu Aysha**, 23, from Nablus, detained for interrogation on December 16, 2018. He was asked by Hamas operatives in the Gaza Strip to promote military activities in Judea and Samaria. **He received messages from his handlers by means of al-Aqsa TV.** He recruited **Sayid Issa**, a Hamas operatives from Nablus, **to carry out a stabbing attack in an Israeli community.**

◆ **Alaa' Sharauna**, 26, from Silwan in east Jerusalem, who carried an Israeli ID card. He was detained for interrogation on January 8, 2019. He revealed he had been recruited by Hamas military wing operatives in the Gaza Strip and asked to form a military squad. He was sent to photograph sites in Jerusalem, exploiting his ID card, which allowed him to move freely throughout the city.

Using al-Aqsa TV to send messages to Hamas recruits in Judea and Samaria

► **Al-Aqsa TV is Hamas' official TV channel and its most important media outlet.** It began broadcasting on January 9, 2006, after Hamas won the Palestinian Legislative Council elections. Following Hamas' takeover of the Gaza Strip a struggle broke out between Hamas and the PA/Fatah for the control of Palestinian media. **Ultimately Hamas succeeded in taking control of most of the media in the Gaza Strip, turning al-Aqsa TV into its main media tool.**

► The al-Aqsa TV building was attacked by Israel during Operation Cast Lead (December 2008) and Operation Protective Edge (July-August 2014). It was attacked again during the round of escalation on November 13, 2018. Since then the channel has experienced many difficulties in maintaining regular broadcasts. On December 20, 2018, Hamas announced it was closing the station because of financial difficulties caused by the destruction of the al-Aqsa TV building. However, al-Aqsa's broadcasts did not come to an end because of the intervention of Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, who was well aware of the station's great importance (alkhaleejonline, UAE, January 5, 2019).



Right: The al-Aqsa TV building attacked by the Israeli Air Force (QudsN Twitter account, November 12, 2018). Left: The ruins of the building after the attack (Shehab Facebook page, November 13, 2018).

► The exposure of the network in Judea and Samaria illustrates **the use Hamas makes of al-Aqsa TV as a channel for sending hidden messages to its recruits in Judea and Samaria**. For example, to prove to Qutaiba al-Nawaja' that he had actually spoken with an operative from Hamas military wing, he was asked to choose a Qur'an verse and the following day to watch the verse on an al-Aqsa TV broadcast. During the broadcast the commentator would discuss the verse. The following day al-Nawaja' watched the broadcast and the verse was discussed. On another occasion, to prove to another recruit that he was in contact with a Hamas operative in the Gaza Strip, he was asked to watch the news on al-Aqsa TV, during which the broadcaster would put down his cup of coffee at the beginning of the program and quote a line from a poem.



The hidden message to the recruit: the al-Aqsa TV broadcaster puts down his coffee cup to prove the recruit is handled by Hamas (Israel Security Agency website, February 13, 2019).

► The Israel Security Agency report gave the names of four media personnel in the Gaza Strip who were involved in recruiting and handling terrorist operatives in Judea and Samaria. The following are the findings of the examination of the names carried out by the ITIC:

- ◆ **Muhammad al-'Arabid**, who represented himself to a recruit as a journalist. **He is in fact a journalist** from the Gaza Strip, a graduate of al-Azhar University in Gaza City. He works for the Hamas organ al-Risalah and **customarily reports from the ground during the Friday "return marches" wearing a Press vest**. His Facebook page is updated regularly. It posts pictures of events from the Friday marches and of wounded Palestinians. He has posted videos of Hamas' military wing displays and **praise for the rockets launched from the Gaza Strip into Israel** (noting that he hopes there will be direct hits). He also posts Qur'an verses and quotations from Islamic literature.



Muhammad al-'Arabid, at the right. He is wearing a Press vest and covering the activities of demonstrator and rioters at the Karni Crossing (Muhammad al-'Arabid's Facebook page, July 13, 2018).

◆ **Musa Alian, 24, who represented himself as a journalist, is a Hamas operative from Jabalia.** He contacted Baha'a' Shujaiah, one of the members of the terrorist network in Judea and Samaria. According to his Facebook page he lives in Gaza City, is single, graduated from the Ramallah Friends School (a Quaker high school that opened in Ramallah in 1869) and is a graduate of al-Najah University in Nablus. **He used his Facebook page to post reports from the Friday "return marches" and the activities of the night harassment unit near the security fence.** His posts note charity activity and prayers at mosques in Jabalia. **He also posted a video and pictures of terrorists from Judea and Samaria, including Ashraf Na'alwa, who carried out the deadly shooting attack in the Barkan industrial zone; and Ahmed Jarar, who headed the squad that murdered Rabbi Razi'el Shevah.** Alian posted a video and pictures of Mahmoud Nabahin, a Hamas terrorist operative who was killed in an IDF attack in the Gaza Strip.



Musa Alian's Facebook profile picture shows him wearing a Press vest.

◆ **Raji al-Hams, 32, from Gaza City, Hamas operative and well-known al-Aqsa broadcaster, is also the director of al-Aqsa's foreign relations.** He sent a recruit in Judea and Samaria confirmation of the authenticity of his recruiter using a coffee cup at the beginning of a broadcast. On his Facebook page he posted pictures of meetings of senior Hamas figures from the Gaza Strip with figures in the external leadership, pictures of Hamas demonstrations in the Gaza Strip and of mass prayers on the Temple Mount, etc.



Right: Raji al-Hams in the al-Aqsa TV studio in Gaza City (Raji al-Hams' Facebook page, September 12, 2016). Left: Raji al-Hams puts down his coffee during a broadcast to confirm the authenticity of a Hamas recruiter (Israel Security Agency website, February 13, 2019).

◆ **Islam Badr, 30, from Jabalia, is a Hamas operative who is also known as a long-time al-Aqsa TV broadcaster.** He is a graduate of the al-Ummah University in Gaza City (founded by Hamas in 2008). **He posted praise for Yahya Ayyash ("the engineer"), who was behind a deadly wave of terrorist attacks in Israel, noting that "we are all his disciples."** As soon as the exposure of the terrorist network in Judea and Samaria

was made public, he posted a video to his Facebook page denying the report of passing hidden messages, claiming that [what was seen on TV] " was only a cup of coffee!"



Islam Badr, broadcaster on Hamas al-Aqsa TV in the Gaza Strip (Filastin al-A'an Facebook page, February 13, 2019).

Palestinian Reactions to the Exposure of the Use of al-Aqsa TV in Recruiting Hamas Operatives in Judea and Samaria

► The Palestinians responded to exposure of the part played by al-Aqsa TV in recruiting Hamas terrorist operatives in Judea and Samaria by claiming it was an Israeli "attack on Hamas medial personnel and al-Aqsa TV." However, they admitted that al-Aqsa TV serves the "resistance" [i.e., Hamas and the other terrorist organizations]. Some of the reactions were the following:

- ◆ **Al-Aqsa TV** claimed Israel was again slandering the channel by saying Hamas was using it as a new method to communicate with its operatives. However, al-Aqsa spokesmen said it would continue to carry the voice of the "resistance" (al-Aqsa TV, February 13 2019).
- ◆ **Salameh Ma'ruf, chairman of the government information bureau in the Gaza Strip**, claimed the exposure was part of an Israeli campaign to justify, in the eyes of the international community, its harm to a Palestinian media outlet and Palestinian media personnel by linking them to terrorism. However he admitted that al-Aqsa TV was "a resistance channel" that used media as a weapon, but used the argument that it was "resistance" carried out according to international law (al-Aqsa, February 14, 2019).

- ◆ **Ahmed Zu'rub, chairman of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate**, strongly criticized the Israel Security Agency report, saying it was preparation for an additional [alleged] Israeli "crime" against members of the Palestinian media and for justifying another attack on the channel. However, he said the Syndicate was proud of the "resistance" carried out by members of the media and by al-Aqsa TV (al-Aqsa, February 24, 2019).

Appendices

The double identities of Palestinians who are members of the media and terrorist operatives have often been exposed in the past. There have also been multiple exposures of Palestinian terrorists using indications of media affiliation **to increase their chances of survival** in riot and fighting arenas, including the "return marches."

- ▶ The following two appendices give past examples:

- ◆ **Appendix A:** Double identities – terrorist operatives who are also media personnel
- ◆ **Appendix B:** Past use of indications of media affiliation to increase the chance of terrorist operatives' survival

Appendix A

Double identities: Palestinian terrorist operatives who also work for the media

► Palestinian terrorist operatives who are also media personnel have been exposed in the past. The following examples are from the "return marches" and Operation Protective Edge.

"The Return Marches"

The death of Ahmed Abu Hussein, a member of a Palestinian media who was also a Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) terrorist operative¹

► On April 25, 2018, **the death of media person Ahmed Abu Hussein was reported**. He was seriously wounded during the "return march" events on Friday, April 13, 2018, while covering a riot near the border fence in the Jabalia area. Due to the complicated nature of his wound he was transferred to a hospital in Ramallah, and from there to the Intensive Care unit in the Tel Hashomer hospital in Israel (Ma'an, April 26, 2018). He died from his wounds in the Israeli hospital.

► An examination of Ahmed Abu Hussein's identity revealed that **in addition to being a media person, he was also a PFLP operative**. The PFLP's military wing issued formal death notices for him on its website. PFLP flags were carried at his funeral. His Facebook page posted notices glorifying the PFLP, its leaders and terrorist attacks. At the same time, he worked for several media outlets in the Gaza Strip, **such as the Bisann News Agency and the PFLP-affiliated Voice of the People Radio** (Facebook page of Ahmed Abu Hussein and the PFLP website April 26, 2014).

¹ For further information, see the April 30, 2018 bulletin, "An ITIC examination reveals that another Palestinian media person killed in the Gaza Strip was a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)."



Pictures of Ahmed Abu Hussein from his Facebook page (April 5 and 8, 2018).



Right: Red PFLP flags wave during the funeral of Ahmed Abu Hussein (Palinfo Twitter account, April 26, 2018). Left: PFLP banner hung at the funeral reading, "the PFLP mourns, with pride and strength, its comrade shaheed journalist Ahmed Abu Hussein" (al-Wataniya, April 26, 2018).



Death notice issued by the PFLP military wing for "the shaheed hero, the journalist Ahmed Abu Hussein" (Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades, April 26, 2018).

The death of Yasser Murtaja, a press photographer who was also an operative in Hamas' security forces²

► **Yasser Abd al-Rahman Murtaja** was a Palestinian press photographer and cofounder of the Ain Media production company. On April 6, 2018, Murtaja was wounded by IDF gunfire while filming Palestinians rioting against IDF forces near the border fence. He died of his wounds on April 7, 2018.



Picture issued by Ain Media in the Gaza Strip shows Yasser Murtaja (right) for the last time. He can be seen standing close to Palestinian rioters (Ain Media Facebook page, April 8, 2018).

► According to Israeli security sources, **Yasser Murtaja had served for years as an officer with the rank of captain in the Hamas security services in the Gaza Strip.** The same sources added that **he was an active operative in the security services** and greatly assisted them in their activity on a daily basis. The 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 forces. Before his death, 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.**

² For further information, see the April 10, 2018 bulletin, "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 .



Senior Gaza Strip police officers with police chief Taysir al-Batsh (right) pay a condolence call to the Murtaja family (Gaza Strip police website, April 8, 2018)

Operation Protective Edge

► The ITIC individually examined the names of 17 fatalities which the Palestinians claimed were journalists killed during Operation Protective Edge. The examination revealed that **eight of the 17 were names of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) terrorist operatives, or were journalists who worked for the Hamas media.** The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate and the Gaza office of the ministry of information, which were behind the publication of the names (and participated in the anti-Israel campaign initiated after the death of Yasser Murtagja) **tried to hide their military identity, representing them exclusively as media personnel.**³

► The findings of the examination indicated **that the Palestinian list of 17 journalists killed during Operation Protective Edge was manipulative** and meant to support the false claim that Israel deliberately killed a large number of media personnel and therefore was guilty of "war crimes" (for which the Palestinians demand that the "murderers" be tried in international criminal courts). **It was part of the Hamas-led Palestinian tactic of deceit and fraud used by Hamas and its affiliated outlets in the political, propaganda and legal war waged against the State of Israel.**

³ For further information, see the February 11, 2015 bulletin, "Examination of the Names of 17 Journalists and Media Personnel Whom the Palestinians Claim Were Killed in Operation Protective Edge."

Appendix B

Past use of indications of media affiliation to increase the chance of terrorist operatives' survival

In many instances in the past **terrorist organizations falsely used indications of media affiliation to promote terrorist attacks**. Terrorist operatives repeatedly wore **Press vests and used media credentials or vehicles to increase their chances of surviving during "popular terrorism" or military attacks**. That endangered the lives of **genuine media personnel** who covered events in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria. The following are examples:

Press vest worn during a riot near the security fence on the Gaza Strip border

► On August 3, 2018, a group of about 20 young Palestinian men **broke into Israeli territory and took control of an abandoned IDF post** in the southern Gaza Strip. The group divided into squads which approached the fence and threw an IED and Molotov cocktail. Three of them broke through the fence, entered Israeli territory, climbed up into the post, took out equipment and returned to the Gaza Strip. The entire event, which in all probability was planned by the "return march" organizers, was videoed and disseminated through the Palestinian media.⁴

► **In the video one of the Palestinians stands near the border fence wearing a Press vest.** He was not identified by the ITIC, but he is clearly young, apparently one of the group. He does not have any equipment to document the event. In ITIC assessment it is highly unlikely that he was a genuine media person, and in all probability wore the vest to protect himself from being shot at by IDF soldiers.⁵

⁴ 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."

⁵ For further information, see the August 14, 2018 bulletin, "Palestinians use indications of media affiliation to protect themselves during anti-Israeli military activities and terrorist attacks."



One of the terrorists who entered Israel wears Press vest.

Press vest worn during stabbing attack in Kiryat Arba (near Hebron)

► On October 16, 2015, a Palestinian terrorist stabbed and seriously wounded an IDF soldier near the city of Kiryat Arba. The stabbing attack was carried out by a Palestinian terrorist, who was disguised as a **press photographer**. He was shot and killed. He was **Iyad Khalil Mahmoud al-Awauda**, 26, from the village of Dura (south of Hebron). **Al-Awauda was released from an Israeli prison on January 2012, after having been in jail for three years.** His father is a retired officer of the Palestinian preventive security forces. **No connection was found between the terrorist and any media outlet.**⁶



Pictures from a YouTube video show terrorist operative Iyad al-'Awauda wearing a Press vest, waving a knife and stabbing an IDF soldier (YouTube, October 16, 2015).

Operation Pillar of Defense

► During Operation Pillar of Defense (November 2012) at least two instances were exposed where terrorist operatives used a vehicle and a building used by the foreign press in the Gaza Strip for purposes of camouflage and protection. In one instance a senior Hamas operative

⁶ For further information, see the October 22, 2015 bulletin, "Stabbing Attack Carried Out in Kiryat Arba by a Palestinian Terrorist Disguised As a Press Photographer."

drove a vehicle marked "TV" to keep Israeli Air Force aircraft from striking it. In another, senior PIJ operatives located themselves on the second floor of the building in the Gaza Strip where the offices of the foreign news agencies were located.⁷



A car belonging to senior Hamas figure Muhammad Riyad Shamlah with "TV" painted in red on the hood (al-Aqsa TV, November 19, 2012).

Operation Cast Lead Launching rockets near the al-Arabiya TV office in the Gaza Strip

► During Operation Cast Lead Hanan al-Masri, a correspondent who worked for al-Arabiya TV, broadcast from the al-Shurouq Tower in the heart of Gaza City. She reported that a Grad rocket had been launched at Israel below her office. She said she heard a very loud noise which she thought was an Israeli Air Force attack. However, it turned out the noise came from the launching of a 122 mm Grad rocket below her office.⁸

⁷ For further information, see the November 20, 2012 bulletin, "Operation Pillar of Defense – Update No. 4. Terrorist Organizations Use Foreign Media Facilities for Camouflage and Protection."

⁸ For further information, see the January 20, 2009 bulletin, "Using civilians as humans shields: launching rockets at Israel from locations close to buildings and schools."



Al-Arabiya correspondent reports about a rocket launch in real time from under her office: she is asked, right picture, "How many..." "The rocket that was just launched was a Grad?" She answered, left picture "[The Grad] was launched under the office."

Other use Camouflaged jeep used carry out a terrorist attack

► On June 10, 2007, the PIJ's website posted a video of a terrorist attack carried out at the Kissufim Crossing. The video showed preparations for the attack, including operatives of the Jerusalem Brigades, the PIJ's military wing, armoring the jeep used in the attack. A blurred picture of the jeep was shown to deliberately hide the words "Press" and "TV."⁹



The jeep at the Kissufim Crossing with TV and Press signs painted on it (Picture courtesy of Yedioth Ahronot and Meir Azoulai).

⁹ For further information, see the June 12, 2007 bulletin, "The attack at the Kissufim Crossing: the Palestinian Islamic Jihad manipulated the media regarding the use of a jeep camouflaged as a press vehicle."



Right to left, the stages of preparing the jeep shown in a Jerusalem Brigades video shown on the Arab and Palestinian media. The video does not show the TV and Press signs, which were painted on the jeep after it had been prepared for the attack (Jerusalem Brigades website, June 10, 2007).