**'Half Of Names Of Gaza Journalist Casualties Are Terror Operatives, Or Members Of Hamas Media'**

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Almost half the names that appear on a Palestinian list of journalists killed during last summer’s conflict with Israel actually belong to Hamas and Islamic Jihad operatives and members of Hamas media outlets who were involved in Gazan terrorist organizations, a new report has found.

The Tel Aviv-based Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center said it conducted an in-depth study of the list of names, which was published by the Hamas-run Gaza Information Office in Gaza a week after hostilities ended in August 2014. The list also was circulated by the Palestinian Journalists’ Union, which, according to the center, is controlled by Hamas in Gaza.

“The study, not yet complete, found that eight out of the 17 names were operatives who belonged to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, or who worked in Hamas media outlets,” the report, published Thursday, stated.

“The Palestinian Journalists Union and the Gazan branch of the Information Office tried to hide the military-terrorist identity of the terror operatives, and present them as journalists in every way,” it added.

It went on to categorize three levels of ties between some of the “journalists” and Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Two terrorists, who were active in the military wings of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, belonged to the “highest level,” the report said. This means that they were armed and uniformed, and carried out public relations missions in Hamas and Islamic Jihad combat units.

The report named one such operative as Abdullah Fatzal Murtaja, a member of the Hamas military wing, Izzadin Kassam, whose name appears in the list published by the Palestinian Journalists Union.

“He served in the Izzadin al-Kassam Brigade’s Shajiah Battalion, and belonged to the military wing’s PR department. He was seen in a video produced by Izzadin Kassam reading out his will, published on YouTube in October 2014,” the center said.

The second operative belonged to the military wing of Islamic Jihad, it added.  A medium level of involvement includes Hamas and Islamic Jihad operatives who fulfilled media roles for outlets affiliated with the two organizations or local Gazan press, according to the study.

The lowest level, encompassing two names on the list, consists of civilian media workers who worked for Hamas’s Al-Aqsa television and Al-Risala newspaper and website.

Dr. Reuven Erlich, head of the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, compared the operatives to Islamic State cameramen who film the beheadings of hostages.

“To call them journalists is completely absurd. The fact that there are those in the world who bought into these lies is scandalous,” Erlich stated.

“Those who bought into it do not have the tools to check the names. For us, this was not easy to do. It took a month of investigation.

“This list is manipulative.  There have been calls to put Israel on trial because of this deception,” he added. “We checked the names as no other organization has done. We have gone over half of the entire Palestinian casualty list from the summer conflict,” he added.

Those who do PR for armed Gazan organizations while serving in their military wings are “terrorists who have cameras, not journalists,” Erlich said.

He added that a few names on the list of 17 casualties belonged to real journalists. “Some were really killed while covering the conflict,” he added.

According to the report, six people who appear on the list were killed while covering the war in various capacities.

“The remainder, or at least the majority of the remainder, were killed during battles in the Strip, while in their homes or while traveling, in circumstances that are unrelated to journalistic work. Their deaths stemmed from the fact that they were in a populated area in which the IDF and terrorist organizations fought. The latter used civilian populations as a human shield,” the report added.

AP photographer Simone Camilli and Palestinian translator Ali Shehda Abu Afash, both who appear on the list, were killed during a truce while covering Palestinian police sappers who were trying to neutralize unexploded Israeli munitions.  There were no IDF units in the area at the time.  The list was distributed by the Gaza Information Ministry under the banner “Heroes of Truth.”