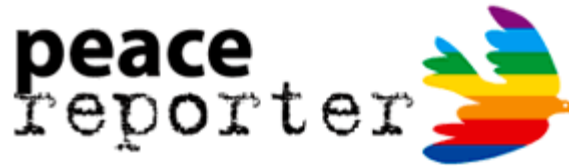


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Mickey Mouse and Al Qaeda in Palestine

Is the Gaza Strip a stronghold of radical Islam?

On Sunday 6 May, Palestinian militants attacked a UNRWA school in Gaza, killing one person and wounding seven, simply because they thought that in the school young boys and girls were dancing together. Apparently, the authors of the attack are the same people who, in the past months, targeted and attacked internet-cafes and swimming pools, places responsible for "keeping people away from Islam". Is the Gaza Strip really becoming a stronghold of fundamentalist Islam?

Mickey Mouse program and propaganda. Many international media reported that the official Hamas television station, Al Aqsa TV, in the last few weeks aired a program hosted by a Mickey Mouse look-alike mouse, which teaches children Islamic values. Israeli media pointed out the program, called "Ruad al Ghad" (Tomorrow's Pioneers), as an example of the legacy of death that Palestinians are passing on to new generations. The mouse teaches hatred towards Israel and the United States, love for armed resistance and the supremacy of Islam. It is not the first time that international media highlight aspects of Islamic propaganda. In the past, they have published excerpts from Palestinian school textbooks. Today, however, emphasizing the importance of a children's program seems to be counterpropaganda aimed at casting a suspicious light upon all the Palestinians.



Anarchy. Since the start of 2007, 161 Palestinians have been killed in violent attacks and 893 injured, 116 people have been kidnapped and 40 organizations, governmental and non-governmental, have been attacked. The situation in the occupied territories, especially in the Gaza Strip, is described as "armed anarchy", due to the violent confrontation among factions. These factions include Fatah and Hamas militias in open disagreement with each other, the armed groups that didn't join the government of national unity, such as the Islamic Jihad, tribal militias and, since last year, apparently also Al Qaeda. An insider with an excellent knowledge of the situation in the Gaza Strip said: "If you ask Gaza's people, they will tell you that Al Qaeda is an American invention. It is a provocation that has challenged and destroyed the idea of ending the occupation and building a democracy. It is an excuse that, unfortunately, becomes reality in a situation without possible solutions: from a social and a human point of view, the reality of the Gaza Strip is absurd. People don't have enough to survive and 40 percent of the youngsters are trying to leave the country. In this context, it is not surprising that militants lean towards this so-called "Al Qaeda". Once again, religious fundamentalism is presented to the public opinion as a cause, while the truth is that occupation is the real problem".



Hamas, al Qaeda and the tribes. Theoretically, the ideal difference between Hamas and Al Qaeda is that Al Qaeda doesn't believe in political negotiations, but only in the "holy war". Hamas has accepted to join the government of national unity and is not involved in violent episodes such as the attack on the UNRWA school, which was carried out by the Salafit group. "The Palestinian government, and Hamas in particular, have nothing to gain from anarchy", said the insider, "but, at the moment, they cannot control it, due, among other reasons, to Hamas, an extremist wing that refuses negotiations and has embraced the Salafit ideology". At the end of March, Al Qaeda's number two, Ayman Al Zawahiri, accused Hamas to give Palestine away. The disappointed supporters of Ismail Haniyeh clearly got the message. When mentioning Al Qaeda in Palestine, however, the reference is not only to Palestinians, but also to those foreign jihad supporters, that everyone claims exist, but nobody has ever met. The insider concluded: "They don't show off. However, Gaza people know each other.

They are Arabs, of course. People here say they are well paid and have access to weapons". On April 25, Michele Giorgio, citing "allegations", wrote: "A few months ago, former Hamas members unhappy with the organization received funds of unclear origin".

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