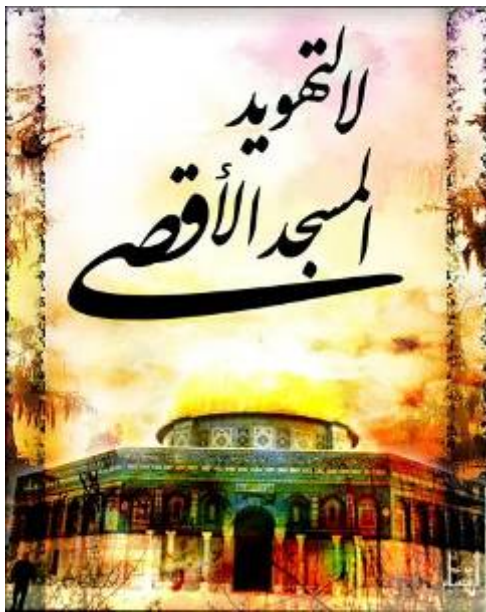




Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center  
at the Israel Intelligence Heritage  
& Commemoration Center (IICC)

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**A Palestinian disinformation campaign led by Hamas claims renovation work done at the Mugrabim ramp in Jerusalem is an Israeli attempt to destroy Al-Aqsa mosque. The Palestinians once again try to use a sensitive religious topic to channel the growing internal Hamas-Fatah violence toward Israel and thus calm internal turmoil.**



Left: A poster from the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades Website. The inscription reads “No! to making Al-Aqsa mosque Jewish.” Right: A poster from the Hamas Website. The inscription reads “At your orders, Al-Aqsa.” On February 6 a posting appeared on the Website accusing Israel of planning to destroy the Al-Aqsa mosque and to rebuild the Temple on its site.

### **Main points**

1. On February 4 renovations began on the Mugrabim ramp in Jerusalem, which leads from the paved area in front of the Western Wall to the Temple Mount’s Mugrabim Gate. The Mugrabim ramp is part of an earthen embankment and was

damaged by an earthquake and the winter storms of 2004, and is currently in danger of collapse.<sup>1</sup> The Israeli Antiquities Authority is undertaking rescue excavations before implementing plans for constructing a new bridge to replace the old one. **The Mugrabim ramp is not part of the Temple Mount and is located outside its boundaries.**



Israel Antiquities Authority

Left: The collapse of the Mugrabim ramp. Right: the Mugrabim ramp, view from the Archaeological Park.

## **The anti-Israeli campaign and its objectives**

2. During the past few weeks, with the worsening of the violent confrontations between Hamas and Fatah, various Palestinians have tried to put Jerusalem and the Temple Mount on the media's agenda to divert attention from internal Palestinian problems and focus it on "the Israeli enemy." Such a modus operandi is familiar from the past and is used when there are no real grounds for complaint, and despite the fact that Israel enabled the renovated Al-Aqsa pulpit (*minbar*)<sup>2</sup> to be brought from Jordan via the Allenby Bridge to Jerusalem on January 24.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Muslim clerics have also agreed that the Mugrabim ramp must be renovated because it is dangerous. They object, however, to Israel's carrying out the renovations.

<sup>2</sup> The *minbar* is the pulpit where the imam stands to deliver sermons.

<sup>3</sup> The Al-Aqsa pulpit was damaged by fire in 1969 when Michael Dennis Rohan, an Australian Christian, apparently unbalanced, set fire to the mosque.

3. The Mugrabim ramp renovations began a few days ago and have been exploited by Palestinians of every political persuasion to castigate Israel, **falsely claiming that the construction work is an Israeli attempt to destroy Al-Aqsa mosque** and “to make Jerusalem Jewish.” The propaganda campaign against Israel is being led by Hamas and orchestrated by Khaled Mashaal in Damascus, but the other Palestinian terrorist organizations are participating, even Abu Mazen’s camp.

4. The objective is clearly to channel the growing internal Hamas-Fatah violence toward Israel and to use the so-called “threat” to Al-Aqsa as a means of defusing the Hamas-Fatah conflict, at a time when there is a summit meeting in Mecca attended by Abu Mazen, the Fatah heads and the leaders of Hamas. Spokesmen for Hamas and the other terrorist organizations even warned Israel that a new terrorist campaign (*intifada*) would break out in the wake of Israel’s “plots” against Al-Aqsa mosque.

5. Heads of the Muslim Waqf (religious endowment) and other Palestinian clerics condemned the construction work and called for the masses to defend the mosque. Prominent among them was a senior Palestinian Authority (PA) cleric named **Taysir al-Tamimi**,<sup>4</sup> who called upon Palestinians to go to Al-Aqsa immediately “to protect it from the bulldozers of the Israeli occupation...which are working to destroy Al-Aqsa mosque.” Al-Tamimi appealed to the Islamic nation and the Mecca summit participants to close ranks because, he claimed, the mosque was “in danger” and “might collapse” (Al-Jazeera TV, February 6).

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<sup>4</sup> Taysir al-Tamimi is a Hebron native and a judge in the Shari’ high Islamic court in the Pam is employed by the Hamas government ministry of religious affairs and endowments. He is known for his radical positions and as affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan. Al-Tamimi has a long record of anti-Israeli incitement.



False claim: “Al-Aqsa mosque is in danger,” Taysir al-Tamimi (Al-Arabiya TV, February 6)

6. Radical elements among Israeli Arabs, headed by sheikh **Ra’ed Salah** (the leader of the northern faction of the Islamic Movement, whose ideology is close to that of Hamas), forcefully joined the anti-Israeli incitement. They did so knowing the extreme sensitivity of the subject of Al-Aqsa mosque among Palestinians and the Arab-Muslim world. For years Ra’ed Salah has orchestrated a hate campaign under the slogan “Al-Aqsa is in danger,” and he and his followers are very active on the Temple Mount. As part of the current campaign, the Islamic Movement’s Website has accused Israel of taking action which would damage Al-Aqsa mosque and called for Israeli Arabs and the Arab-Muslim world to identify with the mosque and protest.<sup>5</sup>

7. On the ground, the response of the Palestinian people and Israeli Arabs to the call to march en masse on Jerusalem and defend Al-Aqsa has been relatively mild. So far there have been a small number of protest demonstrations, but the number may grow. One such demonstration took place on February 6 when 200 Bethlehem University students marched to protest “the Zionist aggression against Al-Aqsa mosque.”

8. The media of the Arab-Muslim world gave wide coverage to the issue, especially Al-Jazeera TV, which broadcast live from the reconstruction work. The program included threats and aggressive statements against Israel. Among reactions from the

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<sup>5</sup> On February 7 sheikh Ra’ed Salah and some of his supporters were detained for questioning in Jerusalem after they tried to break into the excavation site at the Mugrabim Gate. He was captured by television cameras as he spat at a policeman. The Magistrate’s Court in Jerusalem issued a restraining order preventing him from coming closer than 150 meters to the walls of the Old City for the next ten days.

Arab-Muslim world were the following: King Abdullah of Jordan said he was “worried” about the Israeli activity, which was liable to threaten the stability of the region; Syrian TV accused Israel of destroying parts of the Temple Mount; the Egyptian foreign minister warned Israel and called upon it to stop the excavation work; Iranian leader Ali Khamenei, in a meeting with Abdallah Ramadan Shalah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad leader, condemned the excavations and called upon the Islamic world to respond in a way that would “cause the Zionist regime to regret its actions.”

## Appendix

### The Palestinian main responses to the reconstruction of the Mugrabim ramp

#### Hamas

1. On February 4 **Khaled Mashaal**, head of Hamas's political bureau, held a press conference in Damascus to deal with two main issues: Israel's "attack" on Al-Aqsa and the violent Hamas-Fatah clashes. Regarding Al-Aqsa he said:

A. **He claimed that "the Israeli enemy" was planning "another crime"** against Al-Aqsa mosque by destroying "the historic Islamic route" leading to Al-Aqsa mosque. He claimed that "Al-Aqsa and Jerusalem are in danger and are being plotted against."

B. **He called upon the Palestinians to awaken**, to abandon their internal quarrels, to close ranks **and to turn the struggle against Israel**. He asked Palestinians in Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and "the area of 1948" [i.e., the State of Israel] to go to Jerusalem to defend Al-Aqsa mosque.

C. **He threatened "the Israeli enemy"** with an increase in terrorism and violence. He said that the "desecration of Al-Aqsa mosque by Ariel Sharon led to the *intifada* of 2000, and [Israeli Prime Minister Ehud] Olmert and the military and defense leadership should learn [a lesson] from it..."

2. **Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya** accused "the Israeli occupation" of continued "aggression" against Al-Aqsa mosque. He called upon the Mecca summit meeting participants and the entire Palestinian people to join one another to preserve Al-Aqsa and the other holy places (Agence France-Presse, February 6).

3. For the past few days Hamas's satellite TV channel has devoted most of its broadcasts to propaganda films about what it calls "the danger hovering over Jerusalem." On February 6 an open studio was broadcast dealing with what it called "the Israeli plot for Al-Aqsa mosque." Photographs of the reconstruction work being done on the Mugrabim ramp were shown.

4. For the past few days Palestine-info, one of Hamas's Websites, has posted propaganda and calls for protest demonstrations and marches to be held in Gaza and Jerusalem. Two of them were:

A. On February 6 a posting appeared claiming that “the government of the Zionist occupation today [February 6] began committing the crime of destroying two rooms of Al-Aqsa mosque and the Mugrabim Gate route...[as part of] **the Zionist plot for the total destruction of Al-Aqsa mosque and the building of the Temple, which, they claim, was on the same spot.**”

B. The Website also offered a permanent “survey” asking visitors to the site what they thought was the correct action to take against the dangers menacing Al-Aqsa mosque. The preferred course of action (62.02%) was fomenting a new terrorist campaign (*intifada*) and employing “resistance” (i.e., terrorism and violence). The second preference (35.47%) was a broad, popular Arab-Islamic [propaganda] campaign.



The results of the “survey”

### The Palestinian Authority (Abu Mazen)

5. Abu Mazen, currently visiting Saudi Arabia, said that “what Israel is doing at the Mugrabim gate proves its intentions and actions with regard to the destruction of Islamic places are premeditated.” He added that such actions were an obstacle to peace (Palestinian News Agency, February 7).

6. **Palestinian TV, which is controlled by Abu Mazen, joined the anti-Israel campaign** and broadcast many programs and songs dealing with the “danger” facing Al-Aqsa mosque as a result of the Israeli reconstruction. The false claim was raised that Israeli settlers and the “Zionist militia” **had begun excavating beneath the mosque and were threatening to collapse it.** In addition, many documentaries about Jerusalem have been broadcast, as have anti-Israeli propaganda and hate songs dealing with the “liberation” of Jerusalem.



Palestinians have their say. Left: “To the Arab nation I say: Al-Aqsa is being destroyed and we sit by idly. For how long?” Right: “The entire Islamic world should join hands until Jerusalem is liberated, with the help of Allah.”

7. **Rafiq al-Husseini**, director of Abu Mazen’s office, visited Al-Aqsa mosque accompanied by the heads of the Waqf and promised to provide all the necessary aid for the struggle against what he called “the Jewish excavations under the Temple Mount” (Al-Quds, February 6).