

Haaretz Investigation | Israeli Army's Extortion Campaign Against Gazans: 'Contact Us or We'll Say You Reported Your Neighbors to Hamas'

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The Israeli army has started to publish identifying details about Gazans it says spied on civilians for Hamas' General Security apparatus; a military source to Haaretz: the army has received legal permission for the operation



A pamphlet airdropped by the IDF in Gaza.

The Israeli army has started to publish photos and identifying details about residents of the Gaza Strip it says spied on other Gazans for Hamas' General Security apparatus, threatening to continue publishing the details of many others unless they call the IDF first.

A military source told Haaretz that the IDF has received legal permission to engage in this extortion, which is meant to essentially "awaken the public in Gaza and show them that Hamas is following them, and highlight what it is inflicting on them."

Israel's Shin Bet security service, Haaretz was told, is not involved in this initiative.

The identifying details already published are, according to the army, part of the intelligence material the IDF has laid its hands on during its ground operation in the Gaza Strip.

Last Friday, the IDF airdropped pamphlets over mosques in several locations in the Gaza Strip, apparently during noontime prayers. The pamphlets show the photos and ID numbers of 130 men. According to the military source Haaretz spoke with, these men were recruited by Hamas' General Security apparatus in order to spy on Gazan residents.

As part of this role, they gave Hamas personal information about rank-and-file people, including their sexual proclivities or sexual relations outside marriage.

"Call us if you don't want your photo appearing here," it says at the bottom of the last page of the

pamphlet, which is named (in Arabic) "The Revealer." The top part of the same page shows a row of silhouettes.

The page indicates that "hundreds of thousands of reports on you, the people of Gaza, have been collected." Appealing to them directly, the IDF writes: "Do you want to know if you were spied on and reported? Go to the website, enter your ID number and find out who reported you."

Two internal pages contain row after row of photos, names and ID numbers. The IDF also gives a barcode linking to a website through which one can find details about a specific person. Alongside the barcode, it says: "Collaborator with the [Hamas] General Security! Have you found out if your ID number is on the website? We will soon reveal your details to everyone. You can still save yourself - call us."

On the pamphlet's first page, there is a photo of a man, with his name. The caption is: "Today's snitch." The text quotes information this man supposedly provided, about a person who frequently went to Egypt, having relations with a married Egyptian woman whose husband frequently travels to the Gulf States for work.

Palestinians gather in hopes of receiving aid that arrived to the Strip via the U.S.-built temporary pier, earlier this week. Credit: Ramadan Abed/Reuters

The second half of the page says that secret information has revealed spying by the General Security service. "This is but a fragment of the information we have obtained. This is how Hamas has spied on you," it says.

The page also says that "the General Security is a secret Hamas organization which for years has been using informants to follow and spy on you; it is possible your friend or neighbor told Hamas your biggest secrets. We will soon expose all the informants and the reports they collected."

The military source told Haaretz over the phone that the army "didn't put personal stories there. We didn't provide details about what these people knew or collected." But in contrast to these words, the full names of some of the alleged targets of these informants appear on the website.

"The Hamas General Security apparatus spied on (a full name appears here), suspected of being homosexual ... it spied on a young married man (his full name provided) suspected of conducting forbidden meetings with a woman," the website reads.

The website invites surfers to click on links to the original documents behind each name, which can reveal the names and personal details, even intimate ones, of many Gazans who were, according to the IDF, targets of spying and snitching.

The website notes the names of Gazans belonging to other organizations such as Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, who according to the IDF, gave Hamas information about their organizations.

There are reports, for example, indicating that Islamic Jihad has had financial hardships, or about people who have met associates of the Palestinian Authority or Fatah several times, which is considered subversive or suspicious in Gaza under Hamas rule. There are also dozens of ID-style photos of people described by the IDF as "informants or collaborators."

Aid being airdropped into Gaza by the Jordanian air force, earlier this month. Credit: Alaa Al Sukhni/Reuters

According to the writing in some of these photos, one can conclude that they were taken on the background of the logo and heading of the Palestinian interior ministry in Gaza. Some of the photos are of children who look younger than ten, one of them even younger than five. Some names appear without a photo.

The website went live on May 16, the military source told Haaretz. A day later, printed pamphlets were airdropped, with a threat that further names and details of informants would be released.

A few days prior, on May 13, the New York Times revealed the existence of such documents held by the Israeli military intelligence. It appears that the paper's correspondents, Adam Rasgon and Ronen Bergman, were given access to numerous classified documents, some of which they were reporting on.

The military source told Haaretz that material collected by the military intelligence unit charged with collecting documents and technical loot during the invasion of the Gaza Strip allowed the army to "discover a lot about Hamas and its intentions."

Many documents came from this General Security apparatus, the purpose of which was "to spy on anyone living in the Gaza Strip, including simple people cheating on their wives. It wasn't just military or security information. They exploit this information in order to recruit people, working this way in order to maintain their rule."

The source said that the IDF learned from these documents that "ultimately, this harmed ordinary people in Gaza." The army does not treat the publication of these photos as a means of extortion but as "a wish to awaken the public there, showing it what Hamas has done to it. People whose photos we've published were carefully selected by Hamas, which recruited them for spying and extorting people. These are people from clans which are identified with Hamas. It's part of the way Hamas uses people. We propose to all civilians and people who've had similar experiences to give us information." The website says that 10,988 searches were conducted. The number remained throughout Monday and up to the publishing of this story.

A man named Tamer, who published photos of the pamphlet online (with some blurring of identifying details) says that the army's claims are false and that since Israel controls the Palestinian population registry (both in Gaza and the West Bank, AH) it has access to the names and ID numbers of all residents.

Tamer's account on X, opened in October 2023, points to a person or organization embracing or representing the Hamas narrative. He says that after the army's attempts to push Gazans into collaborating with it failed, this new move is intended to evoke internal conflicts among the general public and within families.

Some Gazans told Haaretz that for them it isn't a shocking revelation that Hamas spies on people, "just like other regimes do, including the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah or the Israeli military administration", one said, stressing that often they know who informed on them in certain matters. "These are nefarious methods used by all sides," said another Gazan.

They say that while people don't know whether they'll be killed the next day or not and are busy looking for water and food, there is little chance that the exposure of the names of alleged informants will evoke much furor, or that Israel's psychological warfare will work.

Amira Hass

P.S.

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