

## Report: Hamas leader says hundreds of militants trained in Iran, Syria

Contributed by By Ruth Margalit, Haaretz Service  
Monday, 10 March 2008

Hamas has sent hundreds of militants to train in Iran and Syria in the past two years, a commander in the Iz al-Din al-Qassam military wing of Hamas said in a rare interview with The Sunday Times of London.

Speaking on the record but on condition of anonymity, the Hamas commander, already a senior figure in his late twenties, told the British newspaper that Hamas had been sending militants to Iran for training in both field tactics and weapons technology since Israel pulled out of the Gaza Strip in 2005. Others, he said, go to Syria for more basic training.

" We have sent seven 'courses' of our fighters to Iran," he said in the interview. "During each course, the group is trained to increase our capacity to fight."

The most promising members of each group stay longer for an advanced course and return as trainers themselves, he said, adding "We send our best brains to Tehran. It would be a waste of money to send them and then have them come back with nothing."

The report confirms assessments made by Shin Bet Director Yuval Diskin last week in a speech in front of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

"Hundreds of Hamas members have been sent to Iran for training, and not training periods of a week, two weeks or a month, but for long-term, high-quality training," committee member MK Zvi Hendel (National Union) quoted Diskin as saying last Tuesday.

The Sunday Times' report suggests that these assessments were right and that so far, 150 members of Hamas' military wing have completed training in Tehran, where they study for between 45 days and six months at a closed military base under the command of the elite Revolutionary Guard force.

An additional 150 are currently undergoing training in Tehran, the commander said.

Conditions at the base are strict, he said, adding that a further 650 Hamas militants have trained in Syria under instructors who were themselves trained in Iran. Sixty-two Hamas militants are currently in Syria, he said.

The commander continued to praise the Iranian and Syrian training systems, saying the militants "come home with more abilities that we need, such as high-tech capabilities, knowledge about land mines and rockets, sniping, and fighting tactics like the ones used by Hezbollah [during the Second Lebanon War], when they were able to come out of tunnels from behind the Israelis and attack them successfully."

He further told his interviewers that Hamas was modeling itself on Hezbollah. "We don't have tanks. We don't have planes. We are street fighters and we will use our own ways," he said.