

How the ISW Applied Babel Street Insights to Deliver an Analysis of the Hamas Order of Battle

BABEL STREET INSIGHTS

In early October 2023, an armed conflict between the Palestinian Sunni Islamist group Hamas (a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, or FTO) and Israel broke out near the Gaza Strip and southern Israel. The surprise attack from Hamas, which initiated the conflict, resulted in more than 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals (including at least 35 U.S. citizens in Israel) killed. Hamas and other groups also seized 253 hostages on October 7.* The armed conflict has persisted well into 2024 and resulted in significant casualties and loss of life on both sides.

Following the breakout of this armed conflict, the U.S.-based Institute for the Study of War (ISW) began an ongoing series of reports designed to surface detailed information about the war. ISW aims to advance an informed understanding of military affairs through reliable research, trusted analysis, and innovative education. They are committed to improving the nation's ability to execute military operations and respond to emerging threats to achieve U.S. strategic objectives. ISW is a non-partisan, non-profit, public policy research organization.

Babel Street Delivers Essential Insights

ISW started using Babel Street Insights in early 2023 due to its ability to surface a wide range of unique, multilanguage insights drawn from billions of publicly available data sources worldwide. In December 2023, as the Hamas/Israel conflict escalated with no signs of slowing down, ISW sought to build an open-source fueled report on the order of battle for Hamas' military wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassem Brigades. "Order of battle" is a military term used to describe the tracking of armed forces (troops, ships, aircraft, artillery, etc.) across a defined geographic area.

The Izz al-Din al-Qassem Brigades of interest included five Hamas brigades and their subordinate battalions. The ISW also published a short

explanation of the military wing and how Hamas structured the al-Qassem Brigades. This order of battle aimed to make use of both Hamas and Israeli Defense Force (IDF) reporting to establish a complete, unbiased picture.

ISW recognized that assessments of Hamas' remaining strength in December 2023 would provide important insight as ceasefire discussions became more serious. Using Babel Street Insights capabilities, lead author Brian Carter and his team created a full picture and status report on these critical brigades.

This report included an assessment of the strength of each Hamas unit, which added even more depth and value to the final version.

Completing the Puzzle

To build an effective report and comprehensive analysis, the ISW team leaned on Babel Street Insights to help identify commanders (usually deceased) and Hamas units within the Gaza Strip. This presented challenges including the fact that the IDF used somewhat different names

compared to Hamas. Below is one example of a Babel Street Insights document returned when the team searched قائد كتية بيت لاهيا [Commander of the Beit Lahia Battalion] and, القسم [al-Qassem, for the al-Qassem Brigades — Hamas' military wing].

Ibn Al-Qassam

TWITTER.COM
2023-11-27 21:16 Z

ENGLISH ARABIC

SEARCHED TERMS < 0/0 >



By أين القسام

RT @samera_alsrmy: Martyr Qassam Commander Wael Rajab Abu Suhaib, Commander of the Beit Lahia Battalion in the Qassam Brigades.. 🇵🇸 PS 🇵🇸
#Al-Aqsa_Knights_Team
<https://t.co/dpqqdxxSUy0>

Document Details ▲

FULL SOURCE URL
<https://twitter.com/bnlqsm3514841/status/1729247925736448362>

MENTIONED URL(S)
<https://t.co/dpqqdxxSUy0>

This data helped substantiate the IDF reporting on this particular commander. Building the Hamas order of battle for the Rafah and Khan Younis governorates (in the South) proved much more challenging than in the North. This is partly because the IDF had reported on a number of the battalions and commanders themselves, which tipped and cued names and positions that the ISW team could then search for in Arabic. There was less readily available IDF information to cross-reference in the South.

ISW started by using the names of geographic battalions — such as the “Eastern Battalion” — as keywords. This proved effective and provided a critical hit: من مسجد أبي بكر برفح قائد الكتيبة الشرقية في رفح [The Qassem (referring to the Qassem Brigades) Mujahid Commander, Mohammad Jabril al-Shamali from the Abu Bakr Mosque in Rafah, commander of the Eastern Battalion in Rafah.]

This data suggested to the researchers that there was an Eastern Battalion in Rafah and provided the potential name of a commander. Unfortunately, this commander had died before the war. But his existence and the existence of the unit at all offered a pivotal start towards understanding the Hamas order of battle in Rafah.



Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades

ALQASSAM.PS
2023-08-16 01:58 Z

ENGLISH ARABIC

SEARCHED TERMS < 0/0 >

Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades

{Among the believers are men who have been true to what they covenanted with God, and among them are those who have fulfilled their promise, and among them are those who wait, and they have not changed it with the slightest change.}

Military statement issued by:

...::: Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades :::...

Al-Qassam Brigades celebrates the Mujahid Commander Muhammad Al-Shamali and four of its Mujahideen who rose at the hands of the Takfiri group in Rafah.

The Martyr Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades - the military wing of the Hamas movement - sends a group of its brave knights to Al-Ula:

The Qassami Mujahid Commander/ Muhammad Jibril Al-Shamali

(38 years old) from Abu Bakr Mosque in Rafah, commander of the Eastern Battalion in Rafah

“Babel Street Insights was the vital component that enabled our team to build an incredibly detailed report,” said report lead author Brian Carter. “From helping find archived copies of key posts on the official Hamas website to accessing critical Telegram accounts that would be extremely challenging to find otherwise, Babel Street unlocked hard-to-find pieces of information that helped form a complete picture in the final report.”

The final report from this project was made available through the ISW website as part of a series focused on the Hamas-Israel conflict.

“The ability to access archived documents from websites currently down (like the official al-Qassem Hamas site) was hugely important. This project would not have been nearly as good or complete without these Babel Street capabilities,” said Carter.



*According to a [Congressional Research Service](#) report.

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