



September 21, 2015

PIJ operative Muhammad Allan was detained by an Israeli administrative detention order immediately upon his release from the hospital¹



The headline of an article in Al-Esteqlal, the organ of the PIJ, following the renewed administrative detention of Muhammad Allan: “The prisoner Allan ... will ignite the region” (Al-Esteqlal, September 17, 2015)

Overview

1. PIJ operative **Muhammad Allan** was rearrested by the Israeli Police on September 16, 2015, under an administrative detention order. This was after his discharge from Barzilai Medical Center (in the Israeli city of Ashkelon), where he was hospitalized after a decline in his condition due to his hunger strike, which lasted 65 days. Following the decline in his condition, and concern that continuing the hunger strike could cause irreversible brain damage, the Israeli Supreme Court temporarily suspended his administrative detention. After ending his hunger strike, Muhammad Allan apparently recovered.

¹ Further to the ITIC's Information Bulletin from September 3, 2015: [“Palestinian Islamic Jihad \(PIJ\) twice managed to secure the release of its administrative detainees, accomplished through long hunger strikes accompanied by threats of undermining the lull in the Gaza Strip. They employed a policy of brinkmanship that has potential for future deterioration.”](#)

2. Immediately after being detained, **Muhammad Allan resumed his hunger strike**. However, two days later, Allan announced his decision to end his hunger strike and start eating again. His reason for terminating the hunger strike after two days is still unclear to us.



Administrative detainee Muhammad Allan during his hospitalization at Ashkelon's Barzilai Medical Center (Ma'an News Agency, September 17, 2015)

3. Muhammad Allan was previously imprisoned in 2006-2009 for recruiting suicide bombers and aiding wanted men. In November 2014, he was placed in administrative detention, after the Israeli security authorities received information that he was in contact with other PIJ terrorist operatives in order to promote terrorist attacks. "Security sources" told a reporter for the Israeli daily Ha'aretz that the information received in the case of Muhammad Allan was considerable and serious (Ha'aretz, September 17, 2015).

4. Following are initial reactions to the renewed administrative detention of Muhammad Allan:

A. **The newspaper Al-Esteqlal, the official organ of the PIJ, published an article about the administrative detention of Muhammad Allan immediately upon his discharge from the hospital in Ashkelon. The menacing title of the article was: "The detainee Allan [...] will ignite the region"** (Al-Esteqlal, September 17, 2015).

B. **Ahmad al-Mudallal, a senior PIJ operative in the Gaza Strip, claimed that Israel, as usual, was in violation of the treaties and agreements. He called on international human rights organizations to intervene. Al-Mudallal**

also stated that the PIJ would continue to support its prisoners and would not abandon them (Al-Quds Battalions website, September 17, 2015). **Note:** Other senior PIJ operatives have refrained from commenting on the renewed detention of Muhammad Allan, and their remarks have focused on incitement to violence and terrorism following the events in Jerusalem and the Temple Mount (including Khaled al-Batash's call for the resumption of suicide bombings).

C. **Muhammad Allan's father, Nasr al-Din Allan**, condemned the renewed detention of his son, calling it "abduction". According to him, Israel's action cancels the agreement reached by the parties, which resulted in the end of the hunger strike (Al-Quds Battalions website, September 17, 2015).

D. **Qadura Fares**, chairman of the Palestinian Prisoners' Club, said that the renewed detention of administrative detainee Muhammad Allan is a "show," carried out by the Israeli Military Advocate General, together with the Israeli Supreme Court (PalToday, September 16, 2015).

5. The (temporary) cessation of the administrative detention of Muhammad Allan was perceived by the PIJ as a victory over Israel because, from its perspective, it forced Israel to comply with Muhammad Allan's demands through a combination of public opinion pressure and threats to violate the lull. Muhammad Allan's renewed administrative detention and resumed hunger strike may be perceived by the PIJ as a **prestige-related blow** that erodes, or possibly even eliminates, the image of victory over Israel that Allan managed to achieve.

"The Irish method"

6. On September 20, 2015, following the termination of Muhammad Allan's hunger strike, **Nasser al-Laham**, Editor-in-Chief of the Ma'an News Agency, published an article praising the hunger strikes by administrative detainees. The article states that the strikes reflect what he calls the "**Irish method**," which is **hunger strikes undertaken by individuals**. In his opinion, this method may be **more effective** than the so-called Palestinian method of collective hunger strikes. Nasser al-Laham believes that the "Irish method" is a necessity, despite the difficulty and danger to life inherent in this method.

7. Below is an appendix presenting a brief summary of the hunger strikes by Irish Republican Army (IRA) operatives referred to by Nasser al-Laham in his article. **However, this should not be perceived as an attempt to draw an analogy** between the hunger strikes by IRA operatives and the hunger strikes by PIJ operatives, since the hunger strikes in question were carried out in different countries, under different circumstances, at different points in time and under different administrations.

Hunger strikes by terrorist operatives in order to advance political goals: the case of IRA operatives in Ireland (1980-1981)

Overview

1. **The “Irish method,”** whose adoption is advocated by Nasser al-Laham, refers to **hunger strikes by Irish Republican Army (IRA) prisoners that took place in 1980-1981.** These strikes were intended to achieve a **clear political goal,** mainly **recognition of the strikers as political prisoners rather than criminals** (as they were perceived by the British government). As a result, the prisoners demanded various rights that were granted to political prisoners (rather than criminal prisoners).

2. These hunger strikes were carried out (gradually) by **23 IRA operatives, ten of whom died as a result of the hunger strike.** The British government, headed by **Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, categorically refused the hunger strikers’ demands and also refused to force the hunger strikers to receive medical care when their condition deteriorated.**

Background of the IRA hunger strikes

3. In July 1972, as part of the ceasefire discussions between the British government and the Irish Republican Army (IRA), a decision was made regarding the status of IRA prisoners. The decision stated that the prisoners would receive the status of political prisoners, and by virtue of this status they would be granted the following rights: not to wear prison uniforms, not to do work in prison, the right to meet with other prisoners, organizing educational and recreational activities, rights to receive visits and the right to receive letters and packages at a high frequency. The decision was called Special Category Status (SCS).

4. **The decision to grant IRA prisoners the status of political prisoners was canceled in January 1975 by the Gardiner Committee,** which examined how the British government should deal with terrorists and the underground in Northern Ireland. The Committee decided that the SCS decision compromised the ability to impose discipline and order among the prisoners and therefore had to be revoked. In March 1976, the British government adopted the Gardiner Committee’s recommendations **and ruled that every (IRA) prisoner who was convicted after**

March 1976 would be treated as a criminal prisoner and would not receive the benefits granted to political prisoners. The revocation of the decision led to prolonged protests by hundreds of IRA prisoners and to violent incidents against prison guards in 1977-1979.

Hunger strikes by IRA operatives (1980-1981)

5. **The World Medical Association** defines a hunger striker as “a mentally competent person who has indicated that he has decided to embark on a hunger strike and has refused to take food and/or fluids for a significant interval” (WMA Declaration of Malta on Hunger Strikers, 2006). **The International Committee of the Red Cross** defines a hunger strike as voluntarily refraining from eating in order to achieve a defined goal (Medical and Ethical Aspects of Hunger Strikes in Custody and the Issue of Torture, 1998).

6. **On October 27, 1980**, seven inmates at Maze Prison in Northern Ireland **began the first hunger strike**. Three women from Armagh Prison joined the strike. After 53 days, when one of the striking prisoners was on the verge of death, the British government initiated a settlement offer and the strike was suspended.

7. **In January 1981**, when it became clear to prisoners that their demands had not been met, **the IRA decided to resume the hunger strikes. It was decided that the strikers would not begin their hunger strikes together, and that each one would join it a few days after his predecessor.** This was in order to increase the effectiveness of the strikes, achieve widespread public support and apply maximum pressure on Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

8. **The first striker was Bobby Sands, a senior IRA operative, who began striking on March 1, 1981.** Three other IRA prisoners joined his strike every few days in order to increase the pressure on the British government. The hunger strikes by IRA operatives were accompanied by support marches in Northern Ireland. The popularity of strikers reached its climax in April 1981 when Sands, riding on a wave of popular support, **was elected as a delegate to the British Parliament while he was on a hunger strike in prison.**



Mural of Bobby Sands in Belfast (Wikipedia)

The British government's response

9. **Margaret Thatcher's administration staunchly refused to meet the prisoners' demands** despite international public pressure to end the crisis. Margaret Thatcher said that they were criminal prisoners and not political prisoners, and this accounts for the government's attitude towards them: "We are not prepared to consider special category status for certain groups of people serving sentences for crime. **Crime is crime is crime, it is not political [...]**". When Bobby Sands's condition deteriorated, Minister for Northern Ireland **Humphrey Atkins** said that the British government **would not impose medical treatment on Bobby Sands: "If Mr. Sands persisted in his wish to commit suicide, that was his choice. The Government would not force medical treatment upon him"** (BBC website, May 5, 2006).

10. **On May 5, 1981, Sands died at the prison hospital, after a sixty-six day hunger strike.** Even after his death, Margaret Thatcher refused to give in to the strikers' demands and said in her speech before the House of Commons: "Mr. Sands was **a convicted criminal**. He chose to take his own life. It was a choice that his organization did not allow to many of its victims." (BBC website, May 5, 2006). Three more prisoners who had joined Sands in his hunger strike died in May 1981. In their stead, 19 other prisoners began a hunger strike. A total of 23 prisoners took part in the hunger strikes. **Six of them died during July and August 1981.**

11. In July 1981, some of the families of the prisoners **demanded medical care for their relatives, but the British government objected to forced medical**

treatment. As a result, the hunger strike began to break down. On October 3, 1981, the hunger strikes ended unconditionally, after 10 strikers had died.



Left: The funeral of IRA operative Bobby Sands, head of the hunger strikers (website of an organization established in memory of the IRA operatives who died in the hunger strike). Right: March in support of the hunger strikers after the death of Kevin Lynch, one of the hunger strikers, August 1981 (Sinn Fein party website).

Short-term and long-term results of the hunger strikes

12. The British press dubbed the end of the hunger strikes a clear and decisive victory for the Thatcher government, which did not surrender to the bullying of the Irish separatists. In practice, however, **at the practical level, the hunger strikes led to the meeting of most of the strikers' demands behind the scenes** (albeit belatedly, and even though their demand to be recognized as political prisoners was not met). **At the hearts and minds level**, the strikers managed to draw the attention of world public opinion to their struggle, Margaret Thatcher was presented as a rigid and cruel figure, and her image (and that of the British government) suffered badly. **At the political level**, some see the case as a whole as the main catalyst that caused Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, to prefer involvement in politics to armed struggle (today, Sinn Fein is the strongest nationalist party in Northern Ireland, where it received around one quarter of the votes).