



February 22, 2017

## Elections to the Hamas Political Bureau in the Gaza Strip: Overview and Significance



Postings by Hamas supporters after Yahya al-Sinwar was elected to head the political bureau in the Gaza Strip. Left: Yahya al-Sinwar represented as a threat to Israel (Posting to Hamas' Paldaf forum, February 14, 2017). Right: "Gazan hot pepper" (the stem is the green Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades headband) (Twitter account of Palinfo, February 14, 2017).

### Overview

1. Elections were recently held for **Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip, the highest leadership institution in Gaza**. Several thousand voters participated, **electing 15 members**. **Yahya al-Sinwar** was chosen to head the new political bureau. He was a senior operative in the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing, and a member of the previous political bureau. **He fully represents the positions of the military wing**. **Khalil al-Haya**, also a member of the previous political bureau, was elected as deputy head. **Both hold extremist views** and their election clearly signals the strengthening of **Hamas' extremist wing**, which is based on **former military wing operatives**.

2. **At least five of the new political bureau members are affiliated with Hamas' military wing (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades)**. Two were terrorist operatives released in the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal. **Some of them spent years in Israeli jails**. Among those voted in were residents of the refugee camps, members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, former ministers and a mayor. However,

**operatives affiliated with the military wing hold the main power in the new political bureau.** Many of the political bureau members were born in the 1960s, and **represent Hamas' middle generation**, which took over the reins of leadership when most of the movement's founding members left office or died (the last founding member is **Mahmoud al-Zahar**, who also holds extremist views).

3. The elections in the Gaza Strip were **one stage in comprehensive elections for the movement's institutions**; elections will also be held in **Judea and Samaria and "abroad."** The process will end when the **General Shura Council, Hamas' highest leadership institution, appoints the head of the movement's political bureau.** It is generally accepted that **Ismail Haniyeh**, former head of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip, **will replace Khaled Mashaal.**

4. The results of the election indicate the **strengthening of Hamas military wing in the Gaza Strip**, and its **increasing influence on the movement's decisions.** The balance of power between Hamas in the Gaza Strip and Hamas "abroad" has now tipped in favor of the military and radical wings of the movement based in the Gaza Strip. In ITIC assessment, **the military wing will have great influence, possibly decisive influence, on the decisions made by Hamas overall institutions and on the movement's policies.** That will be the case despite **Hamas' formal hierarchy, according to which the military wing is subordinate to the political leadership.** That is, in ITIC assessment, the most significant result of the recent elections.

5. The increased weight of the military wing is liable to influence decisions made by Hamas about various **important issues, both internal and external.** That includes how the movement will **act with regard to Israel** (whether to continue the policy of restraint, and under what circumstances to deviate from it); **relations with Egypt** (whether to continue the fragile process of improving relations or to continue military cooperation with ISIS's Sinai Province, risking Egyptian hostility); **relations with Iran** (whether to continue improving relations with Iran in order to equip the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades, even at the expense of relations with Sunni Arab countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States); **allotting resources to the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades' military buildup versus Hamas' civilian commitments and responsibilities** (whether to continue giving priority to the military buildup at the expense of the critical needs of the civilian population and risking public anger); **the reconciliation with Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (PA)** (whether to attempt a genuine reconciliation initiative or to strengthen a separate Hamas entity in the Gaza Strip).

6. **Analysis** in Israel and in the internal Palestinian arena, which noted (justly, in ITIC assessment), the **threats** of the rising importance of the military wing, **greatly irritated Hamas**. That was because of concern **lest the rise of the military wing (as exemplified by the election of Yahya al-Sinwar) turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy and lead to an escalation in the confrontation with Israel at an inconvenient time for Hamas**. As a result, senior Hamas figures and Hamas-affiliated commentators have emphasized that continuity is expected in Hamas' current policies, including those relating to Israel. They also noted Hamas' so-called "democratic nature," stressing that the movement's decisions are made by its institutions and not by individuals.

7. **In the Gaza Strip the potential for deterioration is high**, especially because of **Hamas' stated policy that terrorism ("resistance") is the preferable way to conduct the conflict with Israel**. That led Hamas to undertake a military buildup after Operation Protective Edge (as well as after previous IDF operations in the Gaza Strip) and handle terrorist networks in Judea and Samaria. **Along the Gaza-Israel border, however, Hamas is careful to maintain unprecedented restraint**. The election of Yahya al-Sinwar along with the military wing's increasing influence is likely to **increase the potential for escalation in the Gaza Strip**. One important reason for that is the tendency of military wing's operatives to regard the **challenges Hamas faces through the prism of the wing's interests** That may reduce the weight of the political considerations on which Hamas' current policy of restraint is based.

8. This report has two appendices:

- a. **Appendix A** – Information about the new political bureau members
- b. **Appendix B** – Hamas responses to media reports about the election results

## Appendix A

# Information about the New Political Bureau Members

## Overview

1. The Hamas movement, which controls the Gaza Strip, conducts itself in a **semi-secret way** without the genuine participation of the local population. It does not officially publicize the structure of its leadership, how elections are held for its various institutions or even election results. It also does not frequently issue reliable information about the persons elected. **Several thousand movement members vote** in the internal elections for Hamas institutions in the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of Shehab, February 14, 2017). **However, the results of the elections influence the entire Gaza Strip population, which does not participate in electing the institutions that govern it.**

2. **Elections were recently held in the Gaza Strip for Hamas' Gazan political bureau.** Hamas did not publish official results, but the Palestinian and Arab media gave the elections extensive coverage. According to the Palestinian and Arab media, **15 members were elected to the political bureau, nine of them (60%) new.**

3. **Yahya al-Sinwar**, avowedly representing the military wing, was chosen to head the political bureau; **Khalil al-Haya** was chosen as his deputy. **Thirteen other members were elected:** Rawhi Mushtaha, Mahmoud al-Zahar, Salah al-Bardawil, Marwan Issa, Fathi Hamad, Yasser Harb, Jawad Abu Shamala, Ahmed al-Kurd, Atallah Abu Sabah, Ismail Barhoum, Sameh al-Saraj, Muhammad al-Jamassi and Suhail al-Hindi. A "senior Hamas figure," who remained anonymous, **confirmed the names** for the Quds Press, saying that they were **"young faces who can contribute"** (Quds.press, February 13, 2017).

4. On February 19, 2017, **Ismail Haniyeh**, the outgoing political bureau head, met with incoming **Yahya al-Sinwar** to discuss the transition. Also present was **Rawhi Mushtaha**, signaling the importance of the new political bureau. In the meantime, elections are taking place in Judea and Samaria and "abroad," and are expected to be completed during the first half of 2017. Once the elections are over, Hamas' General Shura Council will be appointed (the movement's highest leadership institution), and will meet in a Middle Eastern country to choose Hamas' overall

political bureau. Ismail Haniyeh is a candidate for the replacement of outgoing Khaled Mashaal (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, February 14, 2017).



Left to right: Senior Hamas figure Rawhi Mushtaha, newly-elected political bureau head Yahya al-Sinwar, and political bureau deputy head Ismail Haniyeh meet in the Gaza Strip (Hamas website, February 20, 2017).

## Portraits of the New Political Bureau Members

### Yahya Ibrahim Hassan al-Sinwar (Abu Jamil, Abu Ibrahim)



Left: Yahya al-Sinwar after his release in the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal in 2011 (Karamah Press, February 14, 2017). Right: Yahya al-Sinwar (Facebook page of Issam al-Nakhleh, February 13, 2017).

5. **Yahya al-Sinwar**, formerly a senior Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades operative, was born in 1962 in the Khan Yunis refugee camp. His family comes from Ashqelon (al-

Majdal). He studied at the Islamic University in Gaza City (considered a Hamas stronghold). **Sinwar was one of the founders of Hamas' military wing, and a founder of Hamas' first internal security force, called *al-majd (honor)*** (al-Watan TV, February 17, 2017). In elections for the political bureau, Yahya al-Sinwar won the votes of the Khan Yunis district, his birthplace (al-Quds, February 13, 2017).

6. **Sinwar is known to have extremist views and openly represents the attitude of the military wing. He is considered close to Muhammad Deif, the supreme commander of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades. Yahya al-Sinwar's younger brother, Muhammad Sinwar (aka Abu Ibrahim) was involved in the abduction of Gilad Shalit in June 2006.** In recent years he has been the commander of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades' Khan Yunis brigade.<sup>1</sup> Yahya al-Sinwar has good relations with **Muhammad Dahlan**, the deposed senior Fatah figure and Mahmoud Abbas' principal rival (both Sinwar and Dahlan grew up in the Khan Yunis refugee camp). Sinwar was recently a member of a **Hamas security delegation that met with Khaled Fawzy, the head of Egyptian General Intelligence** (Shasha News, February 17, 2017). In ITIC assessment he was appointed to the delegation because he represented the military wing and because of the importance for Hamas of regularizing relations with Egypt.

7. **Yahya al-Sinwar was involved in planning a series of terrorist attacks in which Israelis were killed. He was also involved in the murder of many Palestinians suspected of collaboration with Israel.** In 1989 Israel sentenced him to four consecutive life terms for his involvement in planning and carrying out terrorist attacks and the abductions of Israeli soldiers. From his prison cell he continued planning terrorist attacks and abductions, **including the abduction of IDF soldier Nahshon Waxman.**<sup>2</sup> While in jail he was the leader of the Hamas prisoners. A tumor was discovered in his brain; an operation in an Israeli hospital saved his life.

8. Yahya al-Sinwar was released from jail in October 2011, **as part of the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal, having served 22 years.** He was considered the most senior terrorist operative freed in the exchange. Upon his release he was appointed to a senior position in Hamas' military wing and liaised between the movement's military wing and its political leadership. He was appointed to Hamas'

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<sup>1</sup> At the height of Operation Protective Edge, in July 2014, the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades issued a recording of Muhammad Sinwar encouraging the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades operatives (YouTube, July 13, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> **Sgt. Nahshon Waxman** was abducted on October 9, 1994, and held hostage by Hamas for six days. He was murdered during an attempt to liberate him, October 14, 1994. Killed in the same attempt was **Cpt. Nir Poraz**.

political bureau in the Gaza Strip in 2012. During Operation Protective Edge he was **one of the operatives who influenced decisions and the conduct of the war**. His house in Khan Yunis was attacked in an aerial strike and the Arab media reported its complete destruction. Because of his long imprisonment in Israel, his extremist positions and affiliation with Hamas' military wing, **he was also made responsible for the "prisoners' portfolio" and for negotiations with Israel concerning captives and missing soldiers**.

9. Yahya al-Sinwar is a shadowy figure who **generally avoids public appearances** and media interviews. He made a rare public appearance at the reception held for the terrorists released in the Gilad Shalit deal, where he called on the military wings of all the terrorist organizations to act immediately to release all the Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. He mentioned the names of some of the prisoners still in prison, among them **Hassan Salameh**<sup>3</sup> (YouTube, October 18, 2011). Because of his long incarceration and his personal commitment to the release of Palestinian prisoners, it can be assumed that **after his election he will increase Hamas' efforts to abduct Israelis as bargaining chips for the release of terrorist operatives**.



**Yahya al-Sinwar calls for Palestinians to act to liberate all the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. The event was a reception held by Hamas for the Palestinian terrorists released in the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal (YouTube, October 18, 2011).**

<sup>3</sup> **Hassan Salameh** was a senior Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades operative during the 1990s. At the time he was **Muhammad Deif's deputy**. He was responsible for the deaths of dozens of Israelis in suicide bombing attacks carried out in retaliation for the death of Yahya Ayyash. He was sentenced to 46 consecutive life terms.

## United States Designation of Yahya al-Sinwar as an International Terrorist

10. On September 8, 2015, the United States added Yahya al-Sinwar to its list of specially designated global terrorists, along with Rawhi Mushtaha and Muhammad Deif. Yahya al-Sinwar was designated as "known for founding the forerunner of the Izzedine Qassam Brigades," and "considered to be one of the most senior and prominent prisoners to be exchanged" in the Gilad Shalit deal (Website of the US Department of State, September 8, 2015).



Left: Left to right, Yahya al-Sinwar, Muhammad Deif, Rawhi Mushtaha. The Arabic reads, "Our leaders terrify our enemies" (Facebook page of Paldf, September 7, 2015). Right: US Department of State notice (Website of the US Department of State, September 8, 2015).



## Khalil al-Haya



Senior Hamas figure Khalil al-Haya holds the gun that belonged to Ahmed Ja'abari at a Hamas military display in the Gaza Strip on December 14, 2014 (Paltoday, December 14, 2014).

11. **Khalil al-Haya** was born in 1960 in Gaza. He was a member of the previous Hamas political bureau. He holds a PhD in Islamic law from the University of Khartoum in Sudan. He was a member of the team that negotiated the release of prisoners in the Gilad Shalit deal. In the recent elections he won a majoring vote in the eastern part of Gaza City (al-Quds, February 13, 2017). Khalil al-Haya's son **Hamza**, who was an operative in Hamas' military wing, was killed in an aerial attack in the southern Gaza Strip in 2008, as he was launching rockets into Israeli territory. In Operation Protective Edge Khalil al-Haya's wife and three children were killed by IDF artillery fire targeting his house in the Sajaiya neighborhood of eastern Gaza City. He is known for his extremist views. He has participated in Hamas delegations to Egypt.

12. As opposed to Yahya al-Sinwar, Khalil al-Haya often makes speeches at rallies and demonstrations, and speaks to the media. **He invariably calls for increasing terrorism ("the resistance") against Israel.** For example:

A. At a rally held in Gaza City to mark the 29<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Hamas, **he called on the PA to support the "resistance" in the West Bank** to defend the Palestinian people. He also called for the release of "political

<sup>4</sup> **Ahmed Ja'abari** was head of Hamas' military wing in the Gaza Strip. He was the ideologue, initiator and planner of the abduction of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. He was killed in an Israeli airstrike on November 14, 2012.

prisoners" and the **end of the PA's security coordination with Israel** (al-Aqsa TV, December 14, 2016).

B. In a speech given in the northern Gaza Strip for the anniversary of the founding of Hamas, he said Hamas had caused Israel to lose strategic power and warned Israel to prepare for a serious blow. He **threatened that Hamas would attack from every direction, on land, through the tunnels, from the high seas and from the sky**. He also stated Hamas supported the "knife intifada" and called on "everyone" to participate (YouTube, December 9, 2016).

C. In a sermon he delivered for Eid al-Adha, he called for Palestinian unification **to incite the intifada** and leave "fire burning" throughout the Palestinian lands. He claimed Israel was the Islamic nation's only enemy, and that it "desecrated" al-Aqsa mosque (alresala.net, September 12, 2016).

D. At a memorial service for operatives killed when a terrorist tunnel collapsed, he said that **every attempt to force the Palestinian people to abandon the "path of resistance" had failed**. He said Hamas would defend the Palestinian territories and people, and **would not give up either jihad or the "resistance."** He called on the Palestinian people to **adopt the path of "resistance" and defend the intifada** (Safa, February 5, 2016).

E. At a rally to mark Palestinian Prisoners' Day held in front of Red Cross headquarters in Gaza City, he said that **Hamas would continue its efforts to abduct Israeli soldiers as bargaining chips to exchange for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails** (al-Aqsa TV, April 17, 2015).

F. At an event organized by the Palestinian police force, he said the law passed in Israel for the regulation and expanding of the settlements meant **the Palestinians had to advance the "resistance program" and promote the "Jerusalem intifada."** He said the "resistance" currently faced great national obstacles, but in the end it would lead to the defeat of Israel (Quds.net, February 15, 2017).

## Suhail al-Hindi



Suhail al-Hindi leads a demonstration of Gazan UNRWA workers to protest the agency's intention to reduce its budget for the Gaza Strip (Arab al-Youm, August 2, 2015).

13. **Dr. Suhail al-Hindi** received a PhD from Cairo University in 2016. He is the **principal of an UNRWA school for boys in Gaza City** (Facebook page of Yasser Abu Zakariya, February 10, 2017). He is also **chairman of the UNRWA staff union in the Gaza Strip**. He makes frequent media appearances regarding the struggle of the UNRWA staff and leads protests against agency budget cuts in the Gaza Strip.

14. After his election to Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip was made public, he made a series of statements in which **he vigorously denied he had been elected to the political bureau. He even claimed he planned to sue those who made the report.** Hamas did not formally relate to the issue of his election.



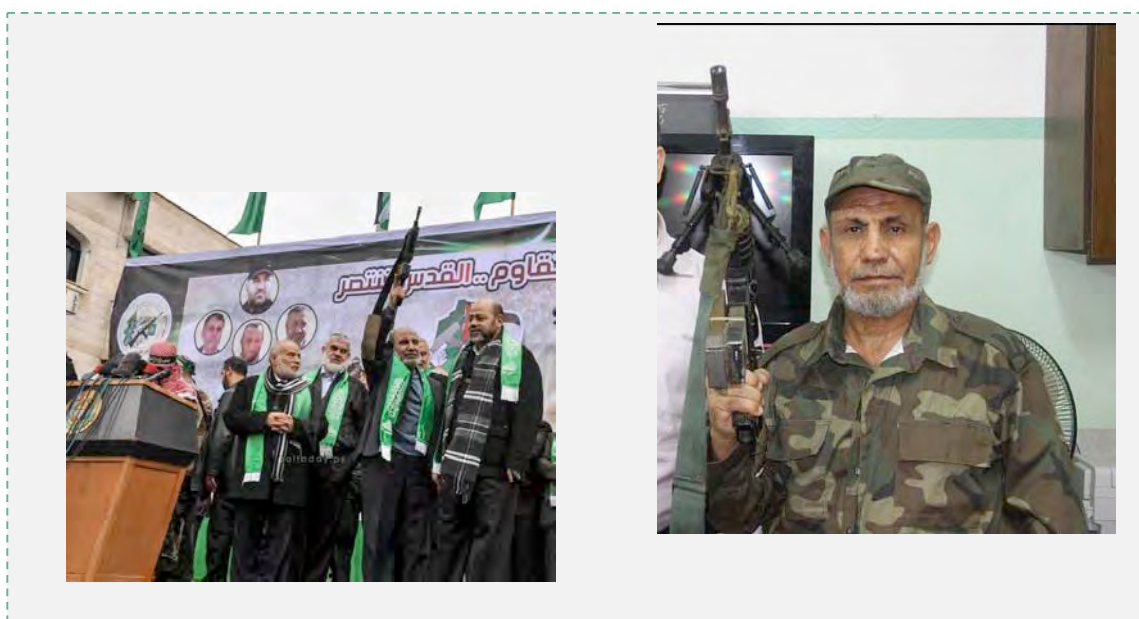
The Facebook page of Suhail al-Hindi, where he posted a denial of the report of his election to Hamas' political bureau (Reposted to the Facebook pages of the Jabalia refugee camp, Palestine Tajmaa'na and Paltoday, February 13, 2017).



Report of a telephone conversation between Suhail al-Hindi and the Sawa news agency in the Gaza Strip, in which he strongly denies he was elected to Hamas' political bureau (PaISawa, February 13, 2017).

15. In ITIC assessment, Suhail al-Hindi's denials should be viewed with suspicion. It is possible they originate from the concern that publicizing his election to the political bureau will make difficulties for him (and Hamas) when dealing with UNRWA. In the past UNRWA objected to its employees' belonging to Hamas or other organizations. In 2009 elections were held for the UNRWA staff union in the Gaza Strip, and Hamas won, which led to tension between Hamas and UNRWA. John Ging, who at the time was the director of UNRWA operations in the Gaza Strip, threatened to fire UNRWA employees who belonged to Hamas or other organizations, but in the end UNRWA did not carry out the threat.<sup>5</sup>

### Mahmoud al-Zahar



Left: Mahmoud al-Zahar raises the gun that belonged to Ahmed Ja'abari, at a Hamas military display (Paltoday, December 14, 2014). Right: Mahmoud al-Zahar, uniformed and holding a rifle, at the end of Operation Pillar of Defense (al-Badr, 2012).

16. **Mahmoud al-Zahar** is a veteran member of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, and one of the movement's founders. He was born in 1945 and trained as a physician. He served a six-month sentence in an Israeli jail and was also incarcerated in the PA. In the 1990s he was expelled by Israel to Marj al-Zuhour in east Lebanon. He was the de facto Hamas administration's "foreign minister" under Ismail Haniyeh. In 2003 he escaped an Israeli targeted attack in the Gaza Strip, during which his eldest son, Khaled, was killed. He is part of the extremist faction in Hamas and favors an uncompromising armed campaign against Israel.

<sup>5</sup> Hamas called for John Ging to be removed from his position, but he continued until 2012. In 2012 he was replaced by Robert Turner. For further information, see the April 28, 2009 bulletin, "Hamas lashes out against the UNRWA chief in the Gaza Strip," at <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/article/18281>.

17. When the most recent wave of Palestinian terrorism began in Judea and Samaria (October 2015), he said that the events in the West Bank and Jerusalem were an intifada in every respect. Hinting at Mahmoud Abbas and the PA, he said that those who called the intifada "a popular awakening" were those who in effect did not want it. Al-Zahar, like other Hamas spokesmen, **called for Palestinians to turn popular terrorism into a military-type intifada** (Paltoday, October 19, 2015). At a mass rally to mark the 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Hamas, he called on people living in Jerusalem and the West Bank **to escalate the "blessed intifada."** He said the Palestinian people had to arm themselves with all means available until Israel left all the territories of Palestine (YouTube, December 14, 2015).

## Rawhi Mushtaha



**Rawhi Mushtaha (YouTube, December 21, 2016).**

18. **Rawhi Mushtaha** was born in Gaza in 1959. Since 2012 he has been a member of Hamas' political bureau. He was among the founders of Hamas' *al-majd* security force during the first intifada (along with Yahya al-Sinwar). He was detained by Israel in 1988 and sentenced to seven life terms for murdering Palestinians who collaborated with Israel. He was incarcerated for 24 years and released in the Gilad Shalit deal in 2011 (Muhit, September 9, 2015). He held Hamas' prisoners and martyrs portfolio after Operation Protective Edge, in conjunction with Yahya al-Sinwar (Paltoday, July 13, 2015). On September 8, 2015, the United States Department of State added his name to its list of designated global terrorists.

19. He accompanied Ismail Haniyeh on his most recent round of visits (September 2016 to January 2017) to Arab-Muslim countries, an indication of his importance in

the Hamas hierarchy in the Gaza Strip. They visited Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Egypt (from which they returned together to the Gaza Strip).

20. Rawhi Mushtaha **often preaches abducting Israeli soldiers as bargaining chips for the release of Palestinian prisoners**. For example:

A. Speaking at Palestinian Prisoners' Day, he said Hamas spared no efforts to initiate deals for the release of prisoners (al-Risalah, April 17, 2015).

B. Interviewed for the anniversary of the Gilad Shalit deal, he said Hamas would work to release all the prisoners from Israeli jails. He added that all the "resistance's" options for their release were open, and abducting soldiers was one of them (alresala.net, October 23, 2013).

C. Speaking at an activity held in Gaza to show solidarity with hunger-striking prisoners, he said that Hamas' final goal was the release of all the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. He said that would be accomplished by abducting soldiers, an alternative that was still viable.

## Salah al-Bardawil

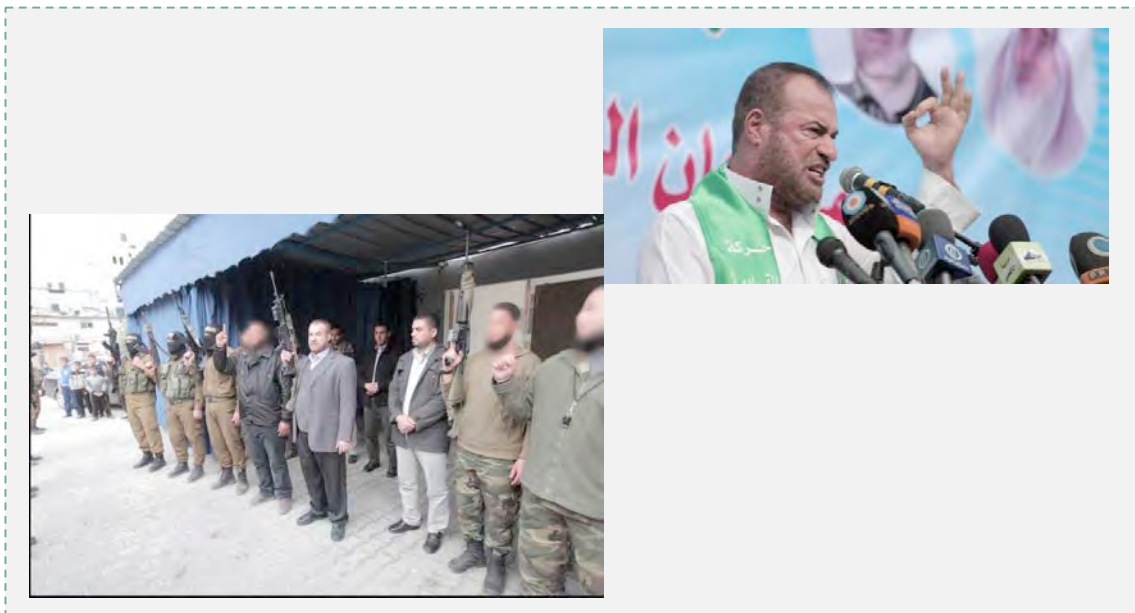


Salah al-Bardawil (alresala.net, February 25, 2015).

21. **Salah al-Bardawil** was born in the Khan Yunis refugee camp in 1959. He has a PhD in Palestinian literature. He was imprisoned in Israel; today he is a Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip. In 2006 he was elected to the Palestinian Legislative Council (Hamas website, February 16, 2017). He is one of the founders of the Hamas-affiliated paper al-Risalah, and was its first editor (Wikipedia, February 16,

2017). Upon being elected to the new political bureau he said Hamas' policies would not change and that Hamas expected to preserve and even strengthen its relations with Egypt.

## Fathi Hamad



Left: Fathi Hamad, holding an M-16 assault rifle, meets with operatives of the nkhba, the elite unit of Hamas' military-terrorist wing, in the northern Gaza Strip (Filastin al-A'an, December 20, 2014).  
Right: Fathi Hamad (al-Ra'i, September 17, 2016).

22. **Fathi Hamad** was born in the Jabalia refugee camp in 1961. **He is a senior Hamas figure in the northern Gaza Strip and considered affiliated with the military wing.** He has a BA in history and an MA in social work. Between 1988 and 1994 he was incarcerated in Israel. He was detained a number of times by the PA security services in the Gaza Strip. Since 1994 he has been a Hamas-faction member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and a member of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip. **Between 2009 and 2014 he was foreign minister in the de facto Hamas administration.** He was also responsible for the al-Aqsa media network, and a founder of the Waed Association for Palestinian prisoners in the Gaza Strip.

23. On September 17, 2016, the United States Department of State added his name to its list of designated global terrorists. Hamas condemned the State Department decision, claiming the American administration was biased in favor of Israel, and called on the administration to retract the designation. A video was posted to the social media showing an armed Hamas operative who said Americans were not welcome in the Gaza Strip. Fathi Hamad said the American decision to include him



on its list only strengthened his resolve to adhere to his path, and that he was proud of having angered the American authorities (Washington Post, September 18, 2016).

24. He said, for example:

A. On January 8, 2017, a rally was held in the Gaza Strip to celebrate a vehicular attack in Jerusalem which killed three Israeli soldiers. Fathi Hamad said, "the [Israeli] soldiers ran away from the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades fighters who carried out the attack for the sake of the Palestinians, the Arab nation and the Muslims" (al-Aqsa, January 8, 2017).

B. In December 2016, speaking at an event marking the 29<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hamas' founding, he said Hamas was ready to export a rocket developed by its military wing for the armies of Arab countries to use against Israel. He said the military wing had successfully manufactured a rocket similar to those manufactured by military factories in states (Safa, December 10, 2016).

C. After a shooting attack carried out by a member of the Palestinian security forces at the Beit El roadblock (January 31, 2016; three IDF soldiers wounded), he said both the shooter and the attack had sent the message to other members of the PA security forces to follow in his footsteps (Dunia al-Watan, January 31, 2016).

### Marwan Issa (Abu Baraa')



**Marwan Issa (Abu Baraa') (third from left) photographed with senior Hamas figures during a visit to Egypt (Hamas forum, November 15, 2012).**

25. **Marwan Issa** was born in the Gaza Strip in 1965, and lived in one of the refugee camps in the central Gaza Strip. In the past he was responsible for Hamas' special operations unit, and liaised with the external leadership (Pal Press, January 21, 2013). He was also in charge of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades forces in the refugee camps in the central Gaza Strip. During Operation Protective Edge his house in the al-Bureij refugee camp was attacked (Filastin al-A'an, July 16, 2014).

26. Marwan Issa was incarcerated in Israel for five years for his involvement in terrorist attacks. In 2006 he was seriously wounded in a targeted attack (Pal Press, January 21, 2013). His oldest son, Baraa', died in 2009 after the Egyptian president refused to allow him to leave the Gaza Strip for medical treatment in Egypt. He was a member of the team that negotiated the Gilad Shalit deal, along with Ahmed al-Ja'abari, Saleh al-Arouri and Nizar Awadallah, who headed the team (Watan, October 15, 2011).

27. Marwan Issa does not frequently appear in public. In a rare appearance in 2015, he said Hamas was not currently seeking a military confrontation with Israel, but preparing to double its force for a future confrontation by **manufacturing its own rockets**. He said Hamas was also seeking alliances with anyone who would contribute weapons, but without its having to owe anything to the donor (Filastin al-Yawm, March 2, 2015).

### Sameh al-Saraj (Abu Fakhri)



Sameh al-Saraj (Abu Fakhri) (Palinfo, February 19, 2013).

28. **Sameh al-Saraj** was a member of the previous political bureau in the Gaza Strip. At an event held in a mosque in Deir al-Balah in 2013 to commemorate Hassan al-Banna [the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood] he called for "the training of a generation that will carry the flag of Islam and liberate Palestine from the pollution of the occupation." He also called on Palestinians to follow the path of Hassan al-Banna and Ahmed Yassin [the founder of Hamas] (Palinfo, February 19, 2013).

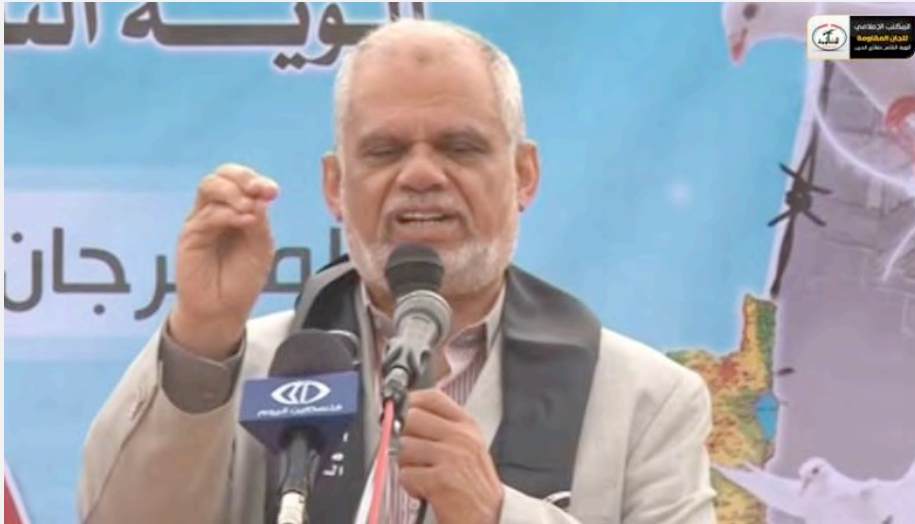
### **Ahmed al-Kurd (Abu Osama)**



**Ahmed al-Kurd (Abu Osama) (alresala.net, August 5, 2012).**

29. In the past **Ahmed al-Kurd** served as the minister of welfare and labor in the de facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip. He was the mayor of Deir al-Balah and chairman of the Islamic al-Salah Association, affiliated with Hamas and considered one of the largest *da'wah* institutions [a social network which is an important Hamas power base] in the Gaza Strip. It has branches throughout the Gaza Strip, educational institutions and private clinics.

## Atallah Abu Sabah



Atallah Abu Sabah (YouTube, April 19, 2014).

30. **Atallah Abu Sabah** was born in 1948. He lives in Rafah. He has a PhD in Islamic law from the Omdurman Islamic University in Sudan. He was formerly minister of justice, minister of prisoners and liberated prisoners affairs, and minister of culture in the de facto Hamas administration. In the past he was incarcerated in Israel for a total of three years. He preaches in mosques in the Gaza Strip and writes articles for the Hamas newspaper al-Risalah.

## Yasser Harb



Yasser Harb (Flesteen, December 15, 2015).

31. **Yasser Harb** is head of Hamas' media unit (Facebook page of al-Risalah, February 17, 2017). In the past he was also a member of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip (Paldf, July 14, 2010).

32. **Muhammad al-Jamassi (Abu Obeida)** lives in Gaza City. He is an engineer. In 2010 armed men abducted him from his house (Arab48, October 31, 2010). The motive was not clear.

33. **Ismail Barhoum** was born in and lives in Rafah. He is thought to be in charge of Hamas in the Rafah region. He belongs to the Barhoum clan, most of whose members are affiliated with Hamas and smuggle merchandise into the Gaza Strip through the tunnels (Karamah Press, September 20, 2014).

34. **Jawad Abu Shamala** – no information available.

## Appendix B

# Hamas Responses to Media Reports about the Election Results

## Overview

1. Senior Hamas figures and **Hamas-affiliated commentators** were quick to respond to the **publication of the elections results** by the Arab, Palestinian and Israeli media. In their responses to the publication of the results, **which they regarded as damaging, there were two prominent themes:**

a. **The election of Yahya al-Sinwar was part of a "democratic process."** Hamas decisions were represented as **decisions made by the movement's institutions after collective deliberations**, and not as the decisions of one or another individual. The message was that **Sinwar was only one member of the leadership and his election would not unduly influence the movement**, including Hamas' policies regarding Israel.

b. **The denial of the commentary in the Israeli and Arab media that the takeover of the political bureau by the military wing could lead to a military confrontation between Hamas and Israel.** Senior Hamas figure **Mahmoud al-Zahar** said **Sinwar's election would not change Hamas' current policy.** A "senior Hamas source" in the Gaza Strip told the London-based newspaper al-Hayat that **"after Operation Protective Edge, the previous political bureau decided not to return to open military confrontations with Israel. That was the decision and it has not been changed"** (al-Hayat, February 15, 2017).

2. Other Hamas figures said the following:

a. **Khaled Mashaal, head of Hamas' political bureau**, in a speech about the "Palestinian cause" televised to the conference in Beirut,<sup>6</sup> said **Yahya al-Sinwar's election was a manifestation of Hamas' democracy**, which was a source of pride for the movement. He said it did not mean Ismail Haniyeh had been expelled from the Hamas leadership [in the Gaza Strip], but rather that according to the movement's regulations, after two consecutive terms as movement leader, he could not serve for a third term. Mashaal added that

<sup>6</sup> The conference was entitled "Analysis of 2016 and prognosis for 2017." It was held by the al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations in Beirut.

**Hamas' strategy was consistent and based on decisions made by its institutions** (Hamas website, February 15, 2017).

b. **Mahmoud al-Zahar, senior Hamas figure in the Gaza Strip**, who was also elected to the new political bureau, said **the election of Yahya al-Sinwar would not mean Hamas policies would change**. Regarding the status of military wing operatives in the new political bureau, he said those who had been elected, including Yahya al-Sinwar, already belonged to the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip. **He called for a distinction to be made between facts and Israel's desire to represent Hamas' military wing as controlling Hamas' political leadership** (alresala.net, February 15, 2017).

c. **Khalil al-Haya, a senior Hamas figure**, claimed the leadership's objective was to implement Hamas' political, social and national programs. **He called on all those trying to frighten the Palestinian people and incite the local, Arab and international communities against Hamas to stop their activities**. He claimed Hamas had an elected leadership that believed in the principle of consultation. **He also asked that Yahya al-Sinwar not be "described in unworthy terms"** (Dunia al-Watan, February 15, 2017).

d. **Taher al-Nunu, a member of Hamas' information unit**, called Yahya al-Sinwar "a commander in every sense of the word," who had devoted his life to Palestine and had recently been elected to Hamas' political bureau. He claimed **al-Sinwar had been elected "democratically"** and his election would have a "good influence" on the movement (Dunia al-Watan, February 19, 2017).

3. As opposed to the moderate, cautious statements made by senior Hamas figures and Hamas-affiliated commentators, who inferred that the movement's policy of restraint vis-à-vis Israel would continue, **the tone of comments on the social media was more inflammatory**. For example, on February 13, 2017, a Twitter account bearing Yahya al-Sinwar's name tweeted the following: **"For myself, I do not seek office, however, I will make Netanyahu weep over his office"** (Twitter account of @YehiaAlsenwar, February 13, 2017). Hamas' information unit rushed to issue a statement that **Yahya al-Sinwar did not have a Twitter or any other social media account** (Hamas website, February 15, 2017).



Postings by Hamas supporters after Yahya al-Sinwar was elected to head the political bureau in the Gaza Strip. Left: Yahya al-Sinwar represented as a threat to Israel (Posting to Hamas' Paldaf forum, February 14, 2017). Right: "Gazan hot pepper" (the stem is the green Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades headband) (Twitter account of Palinfo, February 13, 2017).

4. Hamas-affiliated commentators in the Gaza Strip said the following:

a. **Mustafa al-Sawaf** (the first editor of Hamas' daily newspaper Filastin), rejected claims that the **results of the elections indicated a change in Hamas**. He claimed **Hamas was an "established movement" whose decisions were determined by vote, and that the results applied to everyone**, even if they were contrary to the position of the chairman of the political bureau or the leader of the movement. Therefore, he claimed, **despite Yahya al-Sinwar's position in Hamas, he would be one of those most committed to the movement's policies and decisions**. He also claimed that the **Hamas leadership** made the decisions. He called al-Sinwar a leader who had security, military and political experience, an educated man who had a clear understanding of situations, and was open to everyone when it came to the interests of the Palestinians. He, like the other Hamas leaders, believed that the "resistance" was the only path to liberation. Sawaf said **he expected al-Sinwar's election to hasten the exchange of prisoners and lead to closer relations with Iran** (Facebook page of Mustafa al-Sawaf, February 15; al-Quds, February 13, 2017)

b. **Hussam al-Dajani** (a "political analyst and writer" who works for the **Hamas foreign ministry in the Gaza Strip**), wrote that Hamas' elections were an **important example of democracy**. He claimed al-Sinwar's election **would not influence Hamas either internally or "abroad."** That was because the political bureau in the Gaza Strip comprised only one third of Hamas's executive



committee, which determined policy and strategy. He claimed the political bureaus were executive institutions, and that all political decisions that were made were presented to the Shura Councils (Shehab, February 15, 2017).

c. **Ibrahim al-Madhoun, a pro-Hamas political analyst** who heads a think tank in the Gaza Strip, said the results of the elections would have a good influence on important issues, including relations with various countries, especially **Iran, Turkey and Egypt**. He also predicted Hamas' new leadership would be able to make courageous decisions concerning Israel, **towards escalation or calm** (Ma'an, February 13, 2017). In another article he wrote he hoped al-Sinwar would make more media appearances. He mentioned his charisma and said he had good relations throughout Hamas, including the *da'wah* [Hamas' social network], the military wing and the political leadership (alresala.net, February 16, 2017). Regarding relations with Israel, al-Madhoun said **he did not expect al-Sinwar would try to promote a war, because he was the one who had formulated the equation of the lull in the fighting and was not expected to deviate from it**. However, he said, if Israel was "aggressive" and "violated the existing equation," Hamas would act differently, with no relation to al-Sinwar (al-Quds, February 13, 2017).