



## Muhammad Sawalha, senior Hamas operative living in London, continues participating in Hamas-supported political activities

January 24, 2019

### overview

► Muhammad Kazem Sawalha, a senior Hamas operative living in London, continues his participation in Hamas political activities for recently participated in a conference in Istanbul which opposed Mahmoud Abbas' dissolution of the Palestinian Legislative Council (against which Hamas is waging a political, propaganda and legal campaign). **During the conference Muhammad Sawalha kept a low profile**, in ITIC assessment to keep from drawing fire from the British media (as occurred when he was part of a Hamas delegation to Moscow in September 2017).

► **Sawalha lowered his public activity profile in Britain after his trip to Moscow was made public.** One of the things he did was to quit the board of trustees of the north London Finsbury Park Mosque, which is affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood (Hamas' parent movement). He quit even though **the inquiry carried out by the British Charity Commission following his participation in the Hamas delegation to Moscow found he had committed no offense because Hamas is not designated as a terrorist group in Britain** (only its military wing is banned, as opposed to the United States, where Hamas as an organization is designated as a terrorist group).

**Given the absence of effective British regulations and legislation, in ITIC assessment Britain continues to serve as the European center for Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas activities**, although the activists in Britain operate carefully. They operate in two main spheres, **waging the battle for the hearts and minds of British Muslims** (spreading the Muslim Brotherhood's radical Islam in the local Muslim communities) and **carrying out anti-Israeli activities** (organizing flotillas, spreading propaganda rejecting the existence of the State of Israel, promoting the BDS campaign against Israel and waging anti-Israel lawfare).

### Muhammad Sawalha – Background information

► **Muhammad Kazem Sawalha is a senior Hamas operative involved in Hamas political activities.** In the early 1990s he **moved to Britain**, where he has been involved in extensive

anti-Israel activities, along with other Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood operatives who found a haven in Britain. In the past he had a central role in dispatching aid convoys and flotillas to the Gaza Strip, and contributed to turning Britain into a prominent European center for the campaign to delegitimize Israel. **He has also had a central role in establishing and handling the Muslim Brotherhood's front organizations, and in contributing to indoctrinating the Muslim community in Britain with radical Islamist ideology.**<sup>1</sup>

► Muhammad Sawalha was part of the global Muslim Brotherhood leadership that established the **Global Anti-Aggression Campaign (GAAC)**. (The GAAC is an umbrella organization for the cooperation and strategic coordination for anti-Western and anti-Israeli activities of hundreds of Sunni Islamist Salafist and Salafist-jihadist leaders, as well as Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood activists). The GAAC was mainly active between 2003 and 2016. At least seven central figures who participated in GAAC activities were designated as terrorist operatives by the United States and/or the European Union, primarily because of their support for and aid to al-Qaeda<sup>2</sup>.

### **Recent participation of Muhammad Sawalha in a pro-Hamas conference held in Istanbul**

► **Muhammad Sawalha participates in Hamas political missions abroad:** on September 19, 2017, he was part of a senior Hamas delegation to Moscow, representing the West Bank. On **January 9, 2019**, he participated, along with other Hamas operatives, in a pro-Hamas political conference held in **Istanbul**, sponsored by a the **International Legal Coalition for Palestine** (ILCP).<sup>3</sup> The conference examined the legal aspects of the dispersal of the Palestinian Authority's (PA) Legislative Council, a move Hamas strongly opposes and against which it is waging a political, propaganda and legal campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> For further information, see the October 19, 2017 bulletin "One of the members of a recent Hamas delegation to Russia was Muhammad Sawalha, a London-based Hamas operative engaged in extensive anti-Israel activities."

<sup>2</sup> Steven Merley, "The Global Anti-Aggression Campaign 2003-2015: A Global Muslim Brotherhood, Salafi and Jihadi alliance against the West, February 2017." [https://www.globalmbresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Global\\_Anti-Aggression\\_Campaign\\_2003-2016.pdf](https://www.globalmbresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Global_Anti-Aggression_Campaign_2003-2016.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> **The International Legal Coalition for Palestine (ILCP) is headed by Anis Fawzi al-Qasim**, identified as an opponent of Mahmoud Abbas. He is an academic and was educated in the United States. He was prominent in the struggle against the Israeli security fence in Judea and Samaria held in the International Court of Justice. He was also part of the Palestinian team that participated in the Madrid conference but resigned before the formulation of the Oslo Accords.



The participants of the ILCP conference in Istanbul. Right: Muhammad Sawalha (fourth from left). Left: Muhammad Sawalha (left, with his back to the camera) (Palestinian Popular Committees Abroad website, January 9, 2019; arabi21 website, January 9, 2019).



Muhammad Sawalha (left) photographed with the Istanbul conference participants. Next to him is Anis al-Qasim, who heads the ILCP (racamp.net, January 9, 2019).

► The conference in Istanbul was one of the events where participants have opposed the PA decision to dissolve the Legislative Council, with Hamas involvement. It circumvented the PLO and joined Palestinian figures in the "dispersal" who oppose Mahmoud Abbas and included Jordanian legal experts involved in the Palestinian arena.<sup>4</sup> At least three Hamas operatives participated in the conference: **Muhammad Sawalha**, who lives in London; **Muhammad Faraj al-Ghoul**, from the Gaza Strip, chairman of the legal committee in the Legislative Council and minister of justice in Isma'il Haniyeh's government; and **Marwan Abu Ras**, from the Gaza Strip, a cleric and preacher, a member of the Legislative Council and

<sup>4</sup> The two Jordanian legal experts who participated in the conference were **Muhammad Najib al-Rashdan**, who was in charge of the legal team that defended Saddam Hussein, and **Abdallah Harahshe**, an expert on Palestinian and international law.

chairman the Association of Religious Scholars in Palestine (his son, Issam, was a Hamas' military wing operative and was killed in an Israeli Air Force attack in the Gaza Strip in 2005). In addition, **two Jordanian lawyers** participated in the conference to give it a professional legal status.

### Hamas operatives who participated in the ILCP conference in Istanbul



**Right: Marwan Abu Ras (Marwan Abu Ras' Facebook page, September 26, 2017). Left: Muhammad Faraj al-Ghoul, a Hamas member of the Legislative Council (al-Quds TV Facebook page, August 1, 2018).**



**Muhammad Sawalha (al-Hiwar TV on YouTube, January 15, 2019).**

► In ITIC assessment, at the conference in Istanbul Muhammad Sawalha made an effort to keep a low profile to keep from attracting fire from the British media on the grounds of involvement in pro-Hamas activity (given what happened after his visit to Moscow). For that reason his name was not mentioned in news items about the conference. He also sat with his back to the camera, far from the table reserved for the more important participants. The ITIC has no information about any speech he might have made. Al-Ghoul and Abu Ras

exploited the opportunity to meet with Bülent Yildirim, head of the Turkish organization IHH, the dominant figure of the Mavi Marmara flotilla. Sawalha apparently was not present at the meeting, in ITIC assessment to keep from being conspicuous.

### **Muhammad Sawalha resigns from the board of trustees of the Finsbury Park Mosque**

► The Finsbury Park Mosque in north London, which was notorious during the 1990s because of Abu Hamze, its jihadist imam (an al-Qaeda supporter who was extradited to the United States, where he is serving a term of life imprisonment). After radical Muslim jihadists took control of the mosque its board of trustees was fired and a new board was appointed, composed of members from groups affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Britain<sup>5</sup>. Since 2010 Muhammad Sawalha had been one of the mosque's six trustees. After it was made known that he was a member of Hamas' political bureau and had participated in the visit to Russia (October 2017), a inquiry was begun against him by the British Charity Commission.



**Finsbury Park Mosque**  
(Finsbury Park Mosque Facebook page, June 6, 2017)

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Lambert, *Countering Al-Qaeda in London: Police and Muslims in Partnership*, Hurst & Co, London, 2011, p. 112.

► The inquiry found that **Muhammad Sawalha had committed no offense because in Britain Hamas is not designated as a terrorist group (only Hamas' military wing is banned)**<sup>6</sup>. However, he quit the Finsbury Part Mosque board of trustees, allegedly long proposing to resign, "...**due to his intensive work engagements**" (The Times, January 11, 2019). In the wake of the revelation of his trip to Moscow and the inquiry of the British Charity Commission, he seems to have decided to lower his public profile in activities associated with other institutions (he has resigned from the boards of directors and NGOs affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood).

### Muhammad Sawalha continues appearing on Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated al-Hiwar TV

► **Muhammad Sawalha often appears on al-Hiwar TV**, a satellite TV channel operating in London and **affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood movement**. Involved in operating the channel are **Azzam Tamimi**, a Muslim Brotherhood operative who found a haven in Britain in the 1990s; and **Zaher al-Birawi**, a Hamas operative who is a producer and commentator (in addition to his activities in institutions affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and in anti-Israel activities).



**Muhammad Sawalha moderating a program in the al-Hiwar TV studio, dealing with the issue of political Islam. Only his name appears in the chyron (right) but no role or title (al-Hiwar TV on YouTube, January 15, 2019).**

<sup>6</sup> The identification of Muhammad Sawalha as a political operative is inexact, because **Hamas "political" operatives sometimes carry out military-terrorist activities and "military" operatives carry out political missions**. At the end of the 1980s Sawalha was the senior Hamas military operative in Judea and Samaria and involved in establishing a Hamas headquarters. Part of his role was giving instructions to regional Hamas commanders to establish military networks. Wanted by the Israeli security forces, in October 1990 he fled to Jordan using forged documents, and from there went to Britain, where he had lived to this day. At the beginning of the 1990s he moved between the United States, Britain, Israel, Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip to distribute money from the United States for the support of Hamas terrorist activities. For that reason he was indicted in the United States in 2004. (For further information, see the October 19, 2017 bulletin).