



Hamas encouragement for terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria

November 24, 2021

Overview

- ▶ On November 21, 2021, **Fadi Abu Shehidam, a lone wolf terrorist known as a Hamas activist, carried out a shooting attack near the Temple Mount, killing one Israeli and wounding four.** Hamas rushed to praise him and even claimed he was a high-ranking operative in the organization. Hamas also claimed the 16 year-old Palestinian from Issawiya in east Jerusalem who carried out stabbing attack in Jerusalem was a Hamas operative. However, Hamas did not claim responsibility for either attack. In the meantime, the Israeli security forces reported that a large Hamas terrorist network in Judea and Samaria had been exposed. The network, which planned to carry out show-case mass-casualty attacks, was funded by Hamas operatives outside the Gaza Strip.
- ▶ The most recent attacks, like previous ones, show Hamas' interest in extending its presence in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem. Recently, and especially since Operation Guardian of the Walls, which began in May 2021 when Hamas launched rockets at Jerusalem from the Gaza Strip, Hamas has shown particular interest in Jerusalem and has tried to position itself as "defending" Jerusalem and al-Aqsa mosque. **Mohammed Deif**, commander of Hamas' military-terrorist wing, was also enlisted, and the leadership used his name to call for more terrorist attacks in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem. The success of Hamas' efforts can be seen in the recent spurt of terrorist attacks in Jerusalem carried out by Hamas-sponsored lone wolf operatives, and by the increasing number of Hamas flags and chants of Mohammed Deif's name during demonstrations and Palestinians, including in east Jerusalem.



Sign supporting Hamas hung on the wall of the Deif mosque on the Temple Mount (QudsN Facebook page, July 20, 2021).

- ▶ The Palestinian Authority (PA) attempts to deal with the situation by increasing its oversight of Hamas activities. For example, on November 21, 2021, **Akram al-Rajoub, the governor of the Jenin district**, announced the launching of a campaign to improve security, which included the arrest of wanted operatives (alresala.net, November 21, 2021). The PA also prevented Hamas from publicly celebrating the release from prison of its military-terrorist wing operatives.
- ▶ Hamas attempts to encourage terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria and to subvert security (while at the same time preserve relative quiet in the Gaza Strip and promote an arrangement with Israel). Its objectives are on the one hand to undermine Israel and on the other to bolster Hamas' status among the Palestinians by challenging the PA and sabotaging its governance. Hamas makes continuous efforts to handle and direct terrorist networks in Judea and Samaria. Israel put a stop to most of the efforts while they were still in their early stages, sometimes with PA support, but on a number of occasions the networks successfully carried out lethal attacks. Hamas also works to disseminate its anti-Israeli propaganda and incitement to violence through local and Arab media outlets, and issues calls to the residents of Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem to carry out terrorist attacks.
- ▶ Many of the **terrorist operatives released in the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal** deported to the Gaza Strip play **prominent roles in handling**, directing and funding **the terrorist networks in Judea and Samaria**. In addition several prisoners released in the deal who were returned to their homes in Judea and Samaria have returned to terrorist activity.

Terrorist Attack in the Old City of Jerusalem

► An example of Hamas encouragement for terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria was the response to the shooting attack near the Temple Mount carried out by an apparently lone wolf operative. As noted, the Hamas media consistently praised him and stressed the fact he was a Hamas operative, but the organization did not claim official responsibility for the attack.

The attack

► On the morning of **November 21, 2021**, there was a shooting attack in the Old City of Jerusalem in which an Israeli civilian was killed and four Israelis were injured: one civilian critically, another seriously, and two policemen who sustained minor injuries. The shooter was a Palestinian armed with a rifle who went to the Chain Gate in east Jerusalem and shot indiscriminately at passersby. Police at the site shot and killed him. A knife was also found near his body (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, November 21, 2021).



Right: The rifle used in the attack. Left: The knife found near the terrorist's body (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, November 21, 2021).

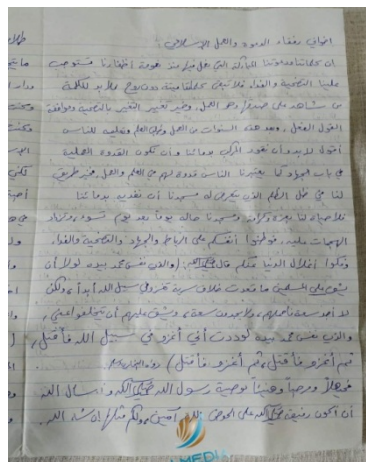
The terrorist operative

► The Palestinian media reported the terrorist was **Fadi Mahmoud Abu Shehidam**, 42, from the Shuafat refugee camp. He had an MA in Islamic law, taught Islamic religion at the al-Rashidiya school in Jerusalem, and delivered sermons in a number of mosques in east Jerusalem (alresala.net, November 21, 2021). The Israeli media reported he was known to the Israeli security forces as a Hamas operative but had never been detained (Ynet, November 21, 2021).



Right: Fadi Mahmoud Abu Shekhidam a few minutes before the stabbing attack. Left: Fadi Mahmoud Abu Shekhidam (Twitter account of journalist Hassan Aslih, November 21, 2021).

► The Palestinian media published Shekhidam's will, handwritten on lined notebook paper. It was signed on November 20, 2021, the day before the attack, addressed to his comrades in Islamist activity, his students and his family. **He wrote that the best way to defend al-Aqsa mosque was to sacrifice blood.** He added that ever since the first time he entered the mosque, his dream had been to hasten his meeting with Allah as a shaheed, and that he had dedicated his life since to preparing, religiously and militarily, for that moment. He asked his family for forgiveness and said he expected them to follow the same path. He signed as "Your loving brother, the shaheed who lives by the will of Allah, Fadi Mahmoud Abu Shekhidam" (Safa, November 22, 2021).



Part of the "will" written by terrorist operative Fadi Abu Shekhidam (Safa, November 22, 2021).

► **His daughter Aya Abu Shekhidam** said in an interview that they were proud of her father's [shooting attack] and would follow in his footsteps (al-Jazeera, November 23, 2021). **His son About Abu Shekhidam** wrote on his Facebook page, "Praise to Allah, you were a shaheed,

you were like a lion and died the death of a martyr like a lion. You died the way you wished. Praise be to Allah [from] the son of a shaheed" (Nabadh website, November 21, 2021).



The terrorist operative's daughter interviewed by al-Jazeera TV, November 23, 2021.

Palestinian reactions

► The Palestinians praised the terrorist attack and the residents of Shuafat refugee camp, where Abu Shekhidam lived, and held a march to his house. Some of them were holders of Israeli ID cards. They carried Hamas flags and chanted their support for Mohammed Deif, commander of Hamas' military-terrorist wing. The Palestinian terrorist organizations declared a day of mourning and candy was distributed to passersby in the street. Immediately after the attack Abu Shekhidam's son praised his father for dying as a shaheed, as he had wished (Aboud Abu Shekhidam's Twitter account, November 22, 2021).



Right: Hamas operatives march through the Shuafat refugee camp (Palinfo Twitter account, November 23, 2021). Left: Hamas flags and mourning notice hung in a wall of Abu Shekhidam's house (Palinfo Twitter account, November 21, 2021).



Activists of the Islamic Bloc (Hamas' student faction) distribute candy at a school in the Gaza Strip (NPA website, November 21, 2021).

- ▶ **Abdallah Siam, deputy governor on the PA Jerusalem district**, blamed Israel and claimed it was responsible for the attack in Jerusalem [carried out by Abu Shekhidam]. According to Siam, Israel's activities in east Jerusalem and the Temple Mount were the cause of the hardships suffered by the Arabs in east Jerusalem (al-Mamlaka TV, November 21, 2021). **Fatah** claimed the attack was a "natural response" to Israel's international violations [sic] on the Temple Mount and the activities and provocations of the settlers who visit the Temple Mount and say their prayers there (Akhbar al-Yawm, November 21, 2021).
- ▶ **Hamas issued a formal mourning notice** for "Sheikh Fadi Mahmoud Abu Shekhidam, senior Hamas figure in the Shuafat refugee camp, who carried out the heroic action in which he killed and wounded Israeli soldiers [sic]." The terrorist attack was represented as a response to "the crimes of Israel (the occupation) in al-Aqsa, Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan" (Hamas website, November 21, 2021). **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, spoke on the phone with the terrorist's family and praised the attack. Haniyeh said he and all of Hamas were proud of the "men of the resistance" [i.e., terrorist operatives] and that Abu Shekhidam had defended al-Aqsa mosque (SerajSat Telegram channel, November 22, 2021). **Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanua** praised the "heroic act," calling it the "natural response to the crimes of the occupation in occupied Jerusalem and its neighborhoods."
- ▶ **Muhammad Hamada, Hamas spokesman in east Jerusalem**, said the attack sent a message to Israel and was a response to its attempts to desecrate and Judaize al-Aqsa mosque. He called it the first of a series of attacks which would increase in intensity (Shehab News website, November 21, 2021). Interviewed by Turkey's 9News channel on November 23, 2021, he praised the attack, claiming the "resistance" [i.e., terrorist attacks] to Israel would continue and intensify. Asked if the attack carried out by Fadi Abu Shekhidam was a lone wolf attack which he initiated personally or a planned attack [by Hamas], he answered

that **Abu Shekhidam carried out the attack on his own initiative and it had not been planned by Hamas** (9News, Turkey, November 23, 2021).



Muhammad Hamada during an interview with Turkey's 9News channel, November 23, 2021.

► **Sheikh Hassan Yusuf, a Senior Hamas figure in Judea and Samaria**, paid a condolence call to the mourning tent erected by the family in the Shuafat refugee camp. He praised Abu Shekhidam for his "colossal attack," saying he was speaking for himself and Hamas as well. He said Abu Shekhidam had given sermons [in mosques], had been an educator and had sacrificed himself for the sake of Allah (Shuafat refugee camp news Facebook page, November 23, 2021).



Sheikh Hassan Yusuf pays a condolence call
(Shuafat refugee camp news Facebook page, November 23, 2021).

► **PIJ leader Ziyad al-Nakhalah** spoke to the Abu Shekhidam family on the phone, calling the attack a "turning point in the history of the Palestinian resistance." He said its objective had been to defend al-Aqsa mosque and the sanctity of Jerusalem (Jerusalem Brigades website, November 22, 2021). **PIJ spokesman Tareq Izz al-Din** also praised the attack, calling it "a natural reaction to Israel's ongoing crimes." He added that Israel would not enjoy security as long as it kept destroying the houses of Palestinians and continued its "actions" (PIJ information bureau Telegram channel, November 17, 2021).



Left: Glorification of terrorist operative Fadi Abu Shekhidam. Left: Celebrating the shooting attack in Jerusalem The Arabic reads, "This is the way" (Palestinian cartoonists' Facebook page, November 21, 2021).

► On the afternoon of **November 17, 2021**, a few days before the attack, a Palestinian terrorist went to Hagai Street in the Old City of Jerusalem and stabbed two Border Police fighters with a knife. The terrorist was **Omar Ibrahim Abu Assab**, a 16 year-old 11th grade student in an Issawiya high school in east Jerusalem. In the past his father had been detained by Israel (QudsN website, November 17, 2021). While he apparently acted on his own initiative and was 16 years old, Hamas rushed to issue a mourning notice for "its son the shaheed" (Hariya Press, November 17, 2021).



Mourning notice issued by Hamas for "its son the shaheed," Omar Abu Assab (Hariya Press, November 17, 2021).

Hamas Terrorist Network Exposed

► The day after Abu Shekhidam's attack, the Israeli security forces reported the exposure of a large Hamas terrorist network in Judea and Samaria. According to the reports from the Israeli Security Agency, a dangerous terrorist network had planned a series of show-case mass-casualty attacks (IDF spokesman, Israeli Security Agency, November 22, 2021).

- ▶ **The network was directed by Hamas operatives outside the Gaza Strip** and planned to carry out terrorist attacks in Judea, Samaria, east Jerusalem and inside Israel. They might also have been planning a mass-casualty attack. In recent months Israeli security forces operated throughout Judea and Samaria, detaining more than 50 Hamas operatives involved in establishing the network. The operatives had weapons, equipment for preparing IEDs and sufficient explosives for three or four explosive belts. Money was also confiscated.
- ▶ The network's activities were funded and directed by senior Hamas figures headed by **Saleh al-'Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau and responsible for Hamas activities in Judea and Samaria.**¹ He operates from abroad and encourages terrorist activity in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem. Also involved was **Zakaria Najib**, who used to live in east Jerusalem, and was one of the terrorists who abducted Nahshon Waxman, murdered by his abductors. Najib was released in the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal.
- ▶ Operatives for the terrorist network were recruited from Judea and Samaria, including from Ramallah, Hebron and Jenin. One of the head recruiters was **Hijazi Qawasmeh**, a Hamas operative from Hebron, who was detained by Israel several times in the past for planning terrorist attacks and membership in Hamas. Hijazi Qawasmeh recruited operatives in Judea and Samaria and met with senior Hamas operatives abroad, receiving instructions and hundreds of thousands of shekels to fund terrorist activities. Saleh al-'Arouri offered him a million dollars to carry out an abduction. Hijazi Qawasmeh is related to **Mahmoud Qawasmeh**, deported to the Gaza Strip in the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal and who operates from Gaza to organize terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria.
- ▶ Another terrorist operative in the network was **Hamza Zahran**, 40, from the village of Bidu near Ramallah. He was detained by Israel several times in the past because of his Hamas terrorist activities, including planning terrorist attacks. He recruited his brother, **Ahmed Zahran**, and other relatives to the network. They acquired weapons and manufactured explosives, and financed their activity with funds from Hamas operatives abroad. Ahmed

¹ **Saleh al-'Arouri** was born in the village of al-Aroura near Ramallah and was one of the founders of Hamas' military-terrorist wing in Judea and Samaria during the 1990s. He was imprisoned in Israel multiple times, released after 18 years and expelled from Israel. He went to Syria, was appointed to Hamas' political bureau, then went to Turkey after the Hamas leadership was expelled from Damascus at the beginning of the Syrian Civil War. In 2015 he was designated as a terrorist by the United States, which did not prevent Turkey from turning a blind eye to his military-terrorist activities. In November 2018 the American Department of State offered a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to his arrest. Today Saleh al-'Arouri is deputy chairman of Hamas' political bureau and responsible for Hamas operations in Judea and Samaria.

Zahran and two other terrorist operatives were killed on September 26, 2021, in a counterterrorist activity in Bidu. Other operatives in the network were **Muhammad Abu al-Hassan**, from the village of Burqin, and **Abd al-Ghani Khadour** from the village of Bayt Sira, both of whom manufactured explosives. According to the Israeli Security Agency, the network was dangerous and planned a series of showcase.

► It was not the first Hamas terrorist network exposed in Judea and Samaria which was directed by Hamas operatives in the Gaza Strip and abroad. After Hamas was evicted from Damascus when the Syrian Civil War broke out, it had to find Arab-Muslim countries where it could situate its local headquarters for handling terrorist networks in Judea and Samaria. Hamas' desire to increase its operational involvement in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem rose after Operation Protective Edge and even more so after Operation Guardian of the Walls.

► Previous Israeli security service investigations revealed that terrorists operating in Judea and Samaria had been recruited, trained and funded in countries such as **Turkey, Qatar, Jordan and Malaysia**, as well as in the Gaza Strip. **Saudi Arabia**, where Mecca is located, was also found to be a convenient meeting place for recruiting terrorist operatives and transferring funds to Judea and Samaria, exploiting the enormous influx of Muslims from around the globe who make pilgrimages to the holy city. Sometimes practical considerations have led to the involvement of more than one country in handling terrorist networks in Judea and Samaria (handlers in far-off countries prefer meeting with their operatives in "halfway countries" close to Israel, such as Turkey and Jordan).