



Palestinian condemnations of the British decision to outlaw Hamas' political bureau

December 7, 2021

Overview

- ▶ On **November 26, 2021**, the British Parliament approved the Home Secretary's Order and **designated Hamas in its entirety as a terrorist organization**. That means that "members of Hamas or those who invite support for the group could be jailed for up to 14 years" (British government website, November 26, 2021). The organization's military-terrorist wing had already been outlawed in March 2001. However, a reassessment of the situation led the British government to outlaw Hamas political bureau as well.
- ▶ The separation of Hamas' military-terrorist wing from its political bureau is artificial and without foundation because the military-terrorist wing and political bureau are interfaced and the distinction between the organization's political-social and military-terrorist activities is vague and blurred. Hamas' political bureau, headed by Isma'il Haniyeh, determines Hamas policy, including everything related to the movement's terrorist, political and social activities, and is exploited to strengthen the military-terrorist wing and its military buildup.
- ▶ Hamas was sharply critical of the British decision, which was regarded as surrender to and support for Israel, and the leadership is clearly worried about the damage done to the movement's image, its efforts to attain international legitimacy and its ability to exploit its branches abroad, in Britain in particular, to enlist support and gain resources. **Taher al-Nunu, Isma'il Haniyeh's media advisor**, said Haniyeh had given instructions for launching a campaign to enlist Arab, Islamic and international support to fight the decision. Al-Nunu stated that the decision would not cause Hamas to change its positions on Jerusalem or the Palestinian cause (al-Aqsa, November 27, 2021). However, it was also claimed the decision had no significance for Hamas and nothing in Britain would change, because **Hamas had no presence in Britain** (al-Ghad, November 27, 2021). Sources affiliated with Hamas in Britain also emphasized for the media that Hamas had no presence in the country.
- ▶ Hamas does not in fact have an official legation in Britain. However, over the years institutions and activists affiliated with Hamas have established a presence, for the most part **camouflaged as Muslim Brotherhood activities or human rights organizations which**

support Palestinian rights. Hamas activity in Britain is mainly reflected in the running of institutions, associations, charity funds and foundations which transfer funds, for the most part to the Gaza Strip; diplomatic activity to display Hamas to British and Western public opinion as a legitimate organization which represents the Palestinians; to erode Hamas' image as a terrorist organization; propaganda activities in the Hamas-affiliated media vilifying Israel and organizing boycott campaigns; organizing convoys and flotillas to the Gaza Strip; lawfare; organizing protests in Britain, etc. The activities are carried out with the involvement of a number of Hamas operatives who fled from Israel and settled in Britain, some of them considered senior operatives, who try to hide their direct connection to the organization (See the Appendix). Their public outcries denying the existence of Hamas activity in Britain give witness to their ties to the organizations.

The British decision

► On **November 19, 2021, Priti Patel, the British Home Secretary, announced that Britain would designate Hamas' political bureau as a terrorist organization.** That meant that anyone who was a member of the organization or supported in any way, including by waving Hamas flags or attending meetings organized by Hamas, would be breaking the law. She stated **the decision had been based on a large amount of information and intelligence relating to the ties of Hamas' political bureau to terrorist activity**, adding the decision would help fight anti-Semitism (The Guardian, November 19, 2021). She tweeted she had undertaken the measure to outlaw all Hamas activity and that the British government was committed to fighting extremism and terrorism (Priti Patel's Twitter account, November 19, 2018).

► Patel gave a speech where she said that "Hamas has significant terrorist capability, including access to extensive and sophisticated weaponry, as well as terrorist training facilities, and it has long been involved in significant terrorist violence. But the current listing of Hamas creates an artificial distinction between various parts of the organisation – it is right that the listing is updated to reflect this. This is an important step, especially for the Jewish community. If we tolerate extremism, it will erode the rock of security."¹ She also noted that Hamas' military-terrorist wing had been outlawed in March 2001, although at the time the government was of the opinion that a distinction had to be made between the military wing

¹ [theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/19/hamas-to-be-declared-terrorist-organisation-and-supporting-it-unlawful](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/19/hamas-to-be-declared-terrorist-organisation-and-supporting-it-unlawful)

and the political bureau. Such a distinction now seemed artificial since Hamas in its entirety was involved in terrorist activity (British government website, November 19, 2018).

► On **November 26, 2021**, the British Parliament approved the measure without a vote and designed Hamas' political bureau and military-terrorist wing as one terrorist organization. The decision was effective immediately. According to a notice on the British government website, support for Hamas would forthwith be considered illegal and membership in or support for the organization could be punished by up to 14 years in prison. The decision would support efforts to protect the British public and support the struggle of the international community against global terrorism (British government website, November 26, 2018).

Palestinian Reactions

► The Home Secretary's announcement (and Parliament's subsequent decision) led to **furious reactions from Palestinians**. Senior figures in the Palestinian Authority (PA), Hamas and other terrorist organizations were enraged. The PLO legation in Britain issued a condemnation saying the decision was unacceptably biased towards Israel ("the occupation") and a gross violation of international law, and calling on the British government to avoid taking such steps (Sawa, November 19, 2018).

► **Hamas** said in an announcement that Britain continued its treachery instead of apologizing for the Balfour Declaration and atoning for its "historical sins." **The Palestinian people, said the announcement, had the right to "resist the occupation" in every way, including with arms**. Hamas accused the "occupation" of terrorism and "war crimes against humanity [sic]" (Shehab, November 19, 2021).

► **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, said Hamas would fight the British decision in the courts. He said they had British lawyers who were formulating a legal strategy to have the decision overturned. He called on the PA and Fatah to join Hamas in the struggle for the sake of the Palestinian people (al-Andalou News, November 28, 2021). **Senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan** called on the British people to oppose the decision (al-Jazeera, November 19, 2021).

► **Taher al-Nunu, Isma'il Haniyeh's media advisor**, said Haniyeh had given instructions for enlisting Arab, Islamic and international support to oppose the decision. Taher al-Nunu said

the affair was regrettable because during recent years Hamas had made strides towards gaining international support (al-Aqsa, November 27, 2021).

► **Hazem Qassem, Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip**, called the decision a British political, legal and moral mistake and a crime against the Palestinian people. He claimed it showed Britain's bias towards Israel, and stated that Hamas would continue its struggle despite "all decisions" (RT TV in Arabic, November 25, 2021).



Hazem Qassem interviewed by RT TV in Arabic (RT TV channel in Arabic, November 25, 2021).

► On **November 24, 2021**, an EU delegation of 20 representatives and ambassadors visited the Gaza Strip. Senior Hamas figures requested they exert pressure on Britain to change its decision (al-Andalou News, Ma'an, November 24 and 25, 2021).

► According to **Mansour Abu Karim, a Gaza-based political commentator**, the decision was the result of direct American pressure on post-Brexit Britain. He said the decision put all the other Palestinian organizations in danger (RT TV in Arabic, November 25, 2021).

► The **Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)** also condemned the decision, claiming it was a mistake because "resistance" [i.e., the Palestinian violence and terrorism] was the legitimate right of the Palestinian people and Britain had to atone for its mistakes and not make declarations that attacked the Palestinian people's legitimate struggle (PIJ Telegram channel, November 19, 2021).

► Even before the Parliament had confirmed the Order, **the Palestinian organizations in the Gaza Strip held an emergency meeting**, after which they warned Britain of the decision's consequences. They regarded it as an attack on the Palestinian people, and said Britain had to rescind it. The organizations announced they would launch an international campaign calling on the UN and Arab League to reject the decision (al-Aqsa, November 20, 2021).



Joint press conference held by the Palestinian organizations in the Gaza Strip (Gaza Post, November 20, 2021).

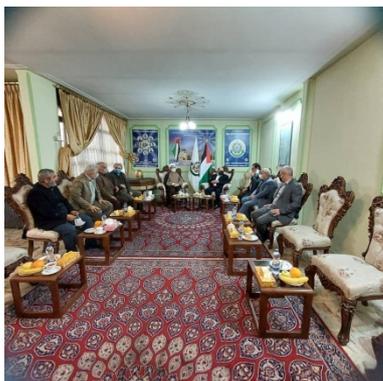


Right: The Palestinian organizations' solidarity with Hamas: shredding the British decision to outlaw Hamas and the Balfour Declaration (Palestinian cartoonists' Facebook page, November 21, 2021). Left: Criticism of the British decision (Alaa' al-Laqta's Facebook page, November 20, 2021).



The Arabic reads, "British support for the occupier state." The signs on the boxer's back read, "The Balfour Declaration" and "Criminalizing the resistance" (Alaa' al-Laqta's Facebook page, November 28, 2021).

► Other condemnations came from the Iranian foreign minister, the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon. **Khaled al-Qaddoumi, the Hamas representative in Tehran**, met with 50 activists and representatives of Iranian organizations who wanted to express support and solidarity with Hamas (Hamas website, November 28, 2021).



Khaled al-Qaddoumi (fifth from left) meets with representatives of Iranian organizations (Hamas website, November 28, 2021).

Reactions of Palestinian activists in Britain

► **Tareq Hamoud, CEO of the Palestinian Return Centre in London**, was interviewed by the BBC in Arabic as a segment of a program about the British decision. He stressed the claim that Hamas had no presence in Britain, adding that he opposed the decision and denied any connection between the Palestinian Return Centre and Hamas, as Israel claimed. He added that in his opinion the decision would have a negative effect on Hamas' flexibility and might complicate political arrangement between Hamas and Israel with the organization (BBC in Arabic, November 26, 2021).



Tareq Hamoud interviewed by the BBC in Arabic (November 25, 2021)

► **Zaher Birawi, a senior Hamas-affiliated activist in Britain**, was interviewed by al-Hiwar TV (where he is also an employee and presents a current events program). He claimed the decision was ridiculed by many people working for the British media because the Home Secretary linked anti-Semitism in Britain with the activities of Hamas' military wing. He claimed Hamas did not operate in Britain and had no presence in the country because Hamas did not operate beyond the borders of the "occupied territories." He alleged that the Home Secretary was closely tied to the Jewish lobby in Britain and to the government of Israel, and in the past had met with senior officials in the Israeli government without reporting the

meetings to the British Foreign Office or the British embassy in Israel. He claimed the objective of the decision was to harm Hamas and British solidarity with the Palestinians and the BDS movement (al-Hiwar TV, London, November 25, 2021).



Zaher Birawi interviewed by al-Hiwar TV after Britain outlaws Hamas (al-Hiwar TV, London, November 25, 2021).

Appendix

Hamas presence in Britain

► While Hamas has no official, formal presence in Britain, over the years institutions affiliated with Hamas have become established in the country, mainly **camouflaged as Muslim Brotherhood activities or as human rights organizations which support Palestinian rights**. Hamas is involved in the activities of institutions, associations, and charitable funds and foundations that transfer money to the Gaza Strip and the PA territories, in diplomatic activities (mainly with extremist elements in the Labour Party), in anti-Israeli propaganda and boycotts of Israel through its activists and affiliated media, in organizing convoys and flotillas, in lawfare, in organizing protests in Britain, etc. The activities are carried out by Hamas operatives who fled from Israel, some of them senior operatives, who settled permanently in Britain but are careful to hide their direct connection to the movement. Some of the Hamas organizations and operatives in Britain that work closely with one another are the following:

Funds, foundations and institutions

Interpal

► **Interpal is a Hamas "charity" located in Britain whose main function is to transfer money for Hamas networks in Judea and Samaria, and primarily for Hamas in the Gaza Strip**. The money comes from British donations, but also from other countries. In the past Interpal was part of the Union of Good, an umbrella organization for dozens of Islamic funds and foundations around the globe that channeled funds into the Hamas coffers.

► Interpal was outlawed in Israel in 1997 and designated as a terrorist organization in 1998. In August 2002 the United States included it in Executive Order 13224, which froze the assets of individuals and groups linked to terrorist organizations.

► Interpal decreased the scope of its activities after it was investigated by the British Charity Commission. A BBC TV program aired in July 2006 called "Faith, hate and charity" contributed to the investigation by exposing Interpal as a political tool supporting Hamas' network of civilian organizations. The program revealed how funds from Interpal were transferred to Hamas-operated charitable organizations in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. Interpal-supported activities were accompanied by indoctrinating the younger

generation with Hamas' extremist Islamist ideology and by fostering the jihad ethos and the shaheed cult by means of a Hamas-affiliated education system. The investigation also noted that **Dr. Assam Yusuf, the Interpal's vice president, who also served as the general manager of the Union of Good, was a Hamas activist.**

► The Charity Commission instructed Interpal to end all connection with the Union of Good. In March 2009 Dr. Yusuf, the dominant figure in Interpal, publicly announced he had completely severed ties with the Union of Good (Insanonline.net/news, May 31, 2009). In reality, however, it is doubtful whether he actually did.² Another difficulty for Interpal came from the PA several years ago because of the activities of Salam Fayyad, at that time PA prime minister, against Hamas' charitable associations operating in Judea and Samaria.

► As of 2009 Interpal has had an official branch in the Gaza Strip, the largest branch outside Britain. It liaises between the organization in Britain and Hamas institutions in the Gaza Strip in need of support, and in effect liaises between Interpal and the de facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip. Its activities in Gaza are coordinated with Hamas and for the most part the funds Interpal transfers to Hamas in Gaza are distributed to entities affiliated with Hamas. The activists who specialized in transferring money from humanitarian assistance funds in Britain to Hamas also played central roles in dispatching humanitarian aid convoys to the Gaza Strip. The role of Interpal's management was particularly prominent in the Miles of Smiles aid convoys for Hamas.³

The Palestinian Return Centre (PRC)

► **The Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) is a Palestinian anti-Israel propaganda organization founded in London in 1996.** It is affiliated with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, and some of its leadership are Hamas operatives who found refuge in Britain. It was founded as a reaction to the Oslo Accords, strongly negates Israel's right to exist and promotes the so-called "right of return" of the Palestinian refugees and their descendants to the places they fled from in 1948 as the main way to fight the peace process. The PRC holds anti-Israeli, anti-Semitic propaganda activities in Britain, Europe and elsewhere around the

² The ITIC has no proof that the connection in fact ended. The London-based newspaper al-Quds al-Arabi reported that Assam Yusuf was in charge of the Union of Good in Europe (alquds.co.uk, May 17, 2011.)

³ In all probability the convoys were used by Interpal to transfer funds to Hamas under the guise of bringing humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip.

glove and is an important member of the network of organizations waging the international campaign to delegitimize Israel.



The PRC logo. The lowercase "r" refers to the return of the Palestinian refugees to Israeli territory. Inside the r is a small map of greater "Palestine." It signifies the PRC's final objective, the establishment of a Palestinian state to replace the State of Israel.⁴

► Since its founding the PRC has been prominent among anti-Israeli organizations in its intense propaganda activity inculcating the concept of the so-called "right of return" and vilifying the State of Israel by representing it as an "apartheid country." The organization also accuses Israel of the alleged "ethnic cleansing" of the Palestinian population, in both the past and present.

► The PRC has three main British target audiences: **the political arena**, primarily the Parliament, where the PRC maintains close ties with extremist Labor Party MPs; **the campuses**, where PRC activists participate in activities and events related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and deliver anti-Israeli speeches; and the British **public in general**, especially the social and cultural elites. PRC activists participate in activities held for Jerusalem Day and Nakba Day, react to developments in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and hold demonstrations and rallies in London and other cities throughout Britain. In addition, the PRC hosts conferences, workshops, seminars and lectures. It produces videos, publishes written material and directs the Palestinian cultural center in London.

► Over the years the PRC clearly aligned itself with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood in Britain. However, it has been careful not to officially admit to its deep connection with the Muslim Brotherhood type of radical Islam, although there is much evidence to prove the connection exists.

► However, in order not to fall afoul of the British authorities, the PRC is generally careful, especially when making statements in English, not to specifically support terrorist activities or terrorist organizations such as Hamas. In statements made in Arabic for Arab-Muslim

⁴ For further information, see the March 2011 bulletin, "The Palestinian Return Centre: London-based center for anti-Israeli propaganda, affiliated with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, outlawed in Israel. It promotes the demand of the Palestinian refugees to return as a way of destroying Israel. Senior PRC figures send flotillas and convoys to the Gaza Strip and funds to Hamas."

populations, on the other hand, the PRC has often shown solidarity with Palestinian terrorism, Hamas' path of jihad terrorism and the Hamas leadership.

► Three PRC board of trustees members, **Zaher Birawi, Majed al-Zeer and Sheikh Majdi Akeel**,⁵ are Hamas operatives who found refuge in Britain during the 1990s. To avoid complications with the British authorities they do not admit to their links with Hamas, but nevertheless they are involved in extensive anti-Israeli activities intended to support Hamas ideologically, politically and practically. Sheikh Majdi Akeel is also active in Interpal, transfers funds to Hamas, and accompanied one of the Viva Palestina convoys which brought aid for the de facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip. Zaher Birawi was also involved in dispatching convoys and in organizing the Mavi Marmara flotilla in May 2010.

► The PRC's affiliation with Hamas led Israel to outlaw it. On December 5, 2010, Ehud Barak, the defense minister at the time, signed an order declaring the PRC an "unlawful organization, part of the Hamas movement." The PRC, said the order, served as "an organizational and coordinated branch of Hamas in Europe...whose activists are senior Hamas operatives working to promote the objectives of the [Hamas] movement in Europe and who have direct connections to various senior Hamas figures, including the heads of the movement in Damascus."⁶

Friends of al-Aqsa (FOA)

► Friends of al-Aqsa (FOA) is an anti-Israeli NGO founded in Britain in 1997, with its center in Leicester, which has a large Muslim population. The FOA has branches in London and other cities. **The organization defines itself as anti-Zionist**, brands Israel as a country with "apartheid policies," supports Hamas and the path of "resistance" [i.e., terrorism] and seeks to end Israel's existence as the homeland of the Jewish people with the slogan, "Liberate Palestine." Like other organizations of the same type, the FOA camouflages and blurs its objectives by using terminology familiar to Western ears, such as "Peace in Palestine,"

⁵ All three were designated Hamas operatives by the Israeli Security Agency when the PRC was outlawed in Israel (Israeli Security Agency website, December 29, 2010). They all deal with activity to promote Hamas' political agenda and help it financially, politically and with propaganda. For further information, see the February 20, 2010 bulletin, "Britain as a Focus for Hamas' Political, Propaganda and Legal Activities in Europe"

⁶ From the Israeli Security Agency announcement outlawing the PRC in Israel (Israeli Security Agency website, December 29, 2010, IDF spokesman's website, December 27, 2010). The announcement relates to the time Hamas headquarters were in Damascus before the movement was forced to leave by the Syrian Civil War.

"respect for international law," "respect for human rights" and "implementing UN resolutions."

► **The FOA has an active role in the campaign being waged in Britain to delegitimize Israel** by collaborating with other activists and organizations. It is an active participant in the BDS campaign to boycott Israel and wants to extend the campaign to include boycotts of large Western corporations that do business with Israel, such as McDonalds, Coca Cola and Amazon. The organization also disseminates anti-Israel propaganda, which its website refers to as "Educating people on the issue of Palestine." In the past senior FOA personnel were involved in organizing and participating in flotillas and convoys to the Gaza Strip.

► **The head of FOA is Isma'il Patel**, a British subject of Pakistani extraction who graduated from Manchester University and lives in Leicester. He has spoken publicly against Israel and supports Hamas, claiming "Hamas is not a terrorist organization...we salute Hamas for its position against Israel." He also participated in the Mavi Marmara flotilla and the Miles of Smiles 3 convoy in June 2011, meeting with Isma'il Haniyeh, who at the time was head of the de facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip.



Activists meet with Isma'il Haniyeh (hurryupharry.org, June 22, 2011). To his right (from left to right) are Sheikh Ibrahim Gabrielas (Jibril), a South African activist who heads a local organization which belongs to the Union of Good; Isma'il Patel (wearing a black skull cap), founder and head of the Friends of al-Aqsa campaign group; Muhammad Ali Harath (head lowered, black beard), Islamist activist and founder and CEO of the Islam Channel in Britain; and Ibrahim Hewitt (wearing a white skull cap), chairman of the Interpal board of trustees.

► In recent years the FOA has organized the annual Palestine Expo, which is generally held in London. Patel was also recently participated in an online conference held on May 9, 2021, the day before Hamas fired the rockets at Jerusalem which led to Operation Guardian of the Walls. His speech was entitled "A speech from the wise to those who stand firm in al-Aqsa" (Dunia al-Watan, May 9, 2021).

Senior Hamas activists in Britain

Muhammad Sawalha

► **Muhammad Kazem Rashid Maarouf Sawalha (Abu Obeida)** was born in the village of Tubas in Samaria in 1961. In 1980 he went to Amman University to study the religion of Islam in the Arts and Sciences Faculty. He received a BA in Islamic law in 1988. He then returned to Judea and Samaria, settling in al-Bireh and teaching in the Islamic law faculty at a school in al-Ram and at the al-Da'wah wasul al-Din College in Beit Hanina in east Jerusalem. He also served as the Judea and Samaria representative of a charitable organization whose head office is in Dubai.

► In addition to his civilian activities, **at the end of 1989 and during 1990, he was involved in establishing Hamas headquarters in Judea and Samaria**, and was in contact with Hamas headquarters in the Gaza Strip. He instructed regional Hamas commanders to establish military-terrorist networks in Judea and Samaria. When Hamas' operational network was exposed he rebuilt it, continued handling Hamas operatives who had not been detained and appointed them to replace the regional commanders who had been detained by the Israeli security forces. His activities put him on Israel's list of wanted terrorists. In October 1990 he fled to Jordan using forged documents, and from there went to Britain where he has lived ever since.

► **Muhammad Sawalha is careful not to publicly admit he has connections with Hamas and studiously avoids any reference to his senior position in the movement.** He is often interviewed by Arab-Muslim media outlets, where **he is represented as a political commentator**, an expert in and researcher of Palestinian issues, or as a researcher of Islamic studies. Hamas also does not make it publicly known that he is one of its senior operatives. He was in fact a member of Hamas' political bureau but neither his name nor picture appeared on Hamas' website on the page devoted to the political bureau (Hamas website, June 24, 2019). During the past two years he has not been named as belonging to the political bureau and is referred to as a senior Hamas figure.

► Since his arrival in Britain he has worked to reinforce his status as one of Hamas' senior figures abroad. Living in Britain has not prevented him from continuing and expanding his political and military-terrorist activities. In 1992 he participated in contacts for talks between the Hamas leadership and the PLO in Sudan. During the first half of the 1990s he was in

contact with Hamas activists in the United States, Judea and Samaria. **He met with Hamas activists in the United States who dealt with fund raising.** Before they left for the Middle East **he gave them instructions as to which operatives in Judea and Samaria they were to channel donations of funds** from the United States. The activity was exposed by the American authorities.

► He was mentioned in an American indictment handed down against **Muhammad Hamid Khalil Salah (Abu Ahmed)**, a Hamas operative born in Jerusalem who moved to the United States where he raised money for Hamas in Judea and Samaria, an activity in which Musa Abu Marzouq, at the time a Hamas operative in the United States, was also involved; today Abu Marzouq is a senior Hamas figure in the Gaza Strip.⁷

ii. **Mohammed Qassem Sawalha**, a/k/a "Muhammad Khadhem Sawalha," "Abu Obeida," "Abu Ubada," "Abu Ubaydah," and "Abu Ubeida," was initially a Hamas leader in the West Bank until he relocated to London, England in the early 1990s. Defendants SALAH and Co-conspirator A met with Sawalha in London while en route from the United States to Israel in 1992 and 1993. During these meetings, defendant SALAH and Co-conspirator A received instructions from Sawalha regarding particular Hamas-related activities they were to carry out while in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.

A paragraph of the American indictment against Muhammad Salah, Abu Obeida, Musa Abu Marzouq and Abd al-Hamid Ashqar.

► **During 2009 and 2010** Muhammad Sawalha participated in dispatching aid convoys to the Gaza Strip, which were Lifeline Convoys, and which were organized by the British Viva Palestina organization, headed by George Galway, a former pro-Palestinian anti-Israeli MP. Sawalha participated in planning convoys and flotillas, and in some instances also took an active part in them

► On **September 19, 2017**, a Hamas delegation to Russia headed by Musa Abu Marzouq and Saleh al-'Arouri also included Muhammad Sawalha. His participation⁸ led the British authorities to take an interest in him. As a result, and because he was on the board of trustees

⁷ For further information, see the July 25, 2019 bulletin, "Muhammad Sawalha, a senior Hamas operative living in Britain, recently participated in a Hamas delegation to Russia. In an attempt to conceal the presence of a Britain-based senior operative, Hamas did not report his participation."

⁸ 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."

of the Finsbury Park mosque, he was investigated by the Charity Commission. The investigation showed he had not actually committed a crime because at the time Britain carried out arrests only for activities involving Hamas' military-terrorist wing.⁹ In the wake of the investigation he resigned from the mosque's board of trustees "...due to his intensive work engagements" (The Times, January 11, 2019).

► Despite his previous bad press, on **July 15, 2019**, Sawalha again participated in a Hamas delegation, headed by Musa Abu Marzouq, on a formal visit to Russia (al-Akhbar, July 16, 2021). His presence in the delegation was played down and his name was not mentioned in official Hamas reports of the visit. He also cannot be clearly seen in pictures taken during the visit. In addition, his presence at a political conference for Hamas support in Istanbul on **January 9, 2019**, along with other Hamas activists, had a low media profile.¹⁰



A Hamas delegation headed by Musa Abu Marzouq meets in Moscow with Mikhail Bogdanov, the Russian foreign ministry. Muhammad Sawalha sits in the front row with his back to the camera (Hamas website, July 16, 2019).

► Apparently, in the wake of the Charity Commission investigation, Muhammad Sawalha decided to maintain a low public profile regarding his activities in other Muslim Brotherhood institutions in Britain, and he seems to have resigned from the various boards and Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated NGOs to which he belonged. On **November 13, 2020**, he participated in an online meeting where he was represented as "a founding member of the Palestinian Club in Britain and formerly chairman of the Islamic Initiative in Britain" (Palinfo website, November 13, 2020).

⁹ Identifying Sawalha as a political activist is not exact, because in Hamas "political" activists often carry out military-terrorist missions, while "military" operatives carry out political missions. During the 1980s Sawalha was a senior military-terrorist Hamas operative in Judea and Samaria and involved in establishing a Hamas headquarters.

¹⁰ For further information, see the January 27, 2019 bulletin, "Muhammad Sawalha, senior Hamas operative living in London, continues participating in Hamas-supported political activities."



Muhammad Sawalha (top right) during an online meeting in Britain of the Palestinian dispersal in London. The meeting was held to reinforce internal Palestinian unity (Palinfo, November 13, 2020).

Zaher Birawi

► **Zaher Khaled Hassan Birawi (Abu Khaled)** is a British activist affiliated with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. He has a long history with Hamas and participated in launching flotillas to the Gaza Strip and in initiating protest marches to Israel's borders, holding the title "coordinator of the international committee for breaking the siege of the Gaza Strip."



Zaher Birawi moderates his al-Hiwar TV program, interviewing Assam Hamad from the Gaza Strip, one of the return march organizers (al-Hiwar YouTube channel, March 9, 2018).

► **Zaher Birawi** was born in the village of Asira al-Shimaliya, north of Nablus, in 1961. In 1988 he was interrogated by the Israeli security forces on suspicion of participation in riots and incitement to rioting. He denied the suspicions. At the beginning of the 1990s he went to study in Britain, where he lives to this day. In Britain he became involved in Islamist activities, especially those associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas' parent organization. In 1966 he went to the Gaza Strip for a short time where he worked at **the Islamic University in Gaza City, an academic institution controlled by Hamas.**

► At the beginning of the 1990s Birawi began his career in Britain as **the spokesman for the Great Mosque in Leeds**.¹¹ Like other Palestinian operatives living in Britain, he exploits its political freedom and freedom of speech for anti-Israeli political-propaganda activities. His activity involves a variety of groups and institutions, and its objective is to promote the Palestinian political agenda affiliated with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. However, he is careful not to publicly link himself to Hamas or the Muslim Brotherhood, thereby avoiding problems with the British authorities and legal system. Over the years he has filled a series of important positions in organizations affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, and by implication with Hamas:

- ◆ Between 2001 and 2003, chairman of **The Muslim Association of Britain**, affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Britain;
- ◆ Chairman and responsible for the public discourse of **The Palestinian Forum of Britain**;
- ◆ A senior activist of **The British Muslim Initiative**, the Muslim Brotherhood in Britain's political branch;
- ◆ He was on the board of trustees of **Education Aid for Palestine**, whose members are Hamas-affiliated activists. The organization was founded in 1993 by Assam Yusuf, one of the founders of Interpal, an organization involved in transferring money to Hamas charitable societies in the Gaza Strip. The EAP represents itself as providing aid to Palestinians through education and training, but in reality it is involved in anti-Israeli activities, for example by organizing demonstrations.
- ◆ He was head of the board of directors of the **Palestinian Return Centre**.

► Zaher Birawi also participated in dispatching Lifeline Convoys to the Gaza Strip, which were organized by Viva Palestina. He may also have liaised between the organization and Hamas. He was involved in the organizing the Mavi Marmara flotilla and participated in its setting sail from Turkey on May 22, 2010. In addition, he was the spokesman for Lifeline Convoy 5.

¹¹ At the time, the Great Mosque in Leeds was linked in the media to terrorist operatives who were involved in lethal terrorist attacks carried out on the Underground and on buses in London in 2005.



Zaher Birawi at the launching of the Mavi Marmara flotilla from the port of Istanbul (probably a picture uploaded to Facebook).

- ▶ On his Twitter account he refers to himself as a **British Palestinian, journalist, broadcaster and chairman of the Europol Forum**.¹² He is also a spokesman for the Palestinian Forum in Britain and director of the Palestinian Return Centre Zaher Birawi (Twitter account).
- ▶ In **January 2021** Zaher Birawi reached an arrangement with World-Check, a "database of politically exposed persons and heightened risk individuals...around the world" (Wikipedia), for removing his name from its blacklist after claims he was connected to terrorist activity. The company also compensated him financially. He claimed his name was put on the blacklist by mistake, unjustly and with no evidence, and it was because Israel had designated him as a terrorist operative in 2013 in the wake of his activity in organizing flotillas to the Gaza Strip. He claimed that including his name on the list had severe financial consequences for him (middleeasteye.net, January 12, 2021).
- ▶ Today Zaher Birawi is program director for the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated al-Hiwar TV channel, providing a media platform for activities in the Gaza Strip (al-Hiwar TV Facebook page). In addition, he appears on various media outlets where he is represented as a Palestinian political commentator and media person in Britain. Interviewed by Russian Sputnik TV in Arabic, he related to the situation in the Gaza Strip and Hamas after Operation Guardian of the Walls (Sputnik TV in Arabic, June 6, 2021). On **June 16, 2021**, along with a Palestinian delegation, he visited the Turkish embassy in London, where he thanked Turkey for its support of the Palestinians during Operation Guardian of the Walls (SadaNews, June 16, 2021).

¹² The Europol Forum defines itself as a non-partisan independent political organization based in London working to construct networks in Europe for supporting and promoting the realization of the rights of the Palestinians. Intelligence experts have identified the organization as having the same ideology as the Muslim Brotherhood.



**Right: Zaher Birawi during an interview (Palestinians Abroad Facebook page, October 2, 2021).
Left: Zaher Birawi (second from right) during a visit of a Palestinian delegation at the Turkish embassy in London (SadaNews, June 19, 2021).**

Media

Al-Hiwar TV

► Al-Hiwar is an Arabic-language satellite TV channel operating in London and affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Its chairman is **Dr. Azzam al-Tamimi, a Muslim Brotherhood activist**.¹³ Zaher Birawi is the channel's program director and head presenter. The channel is an important propaganda tool in Britain and is directed at Muslims throughout the world, especially in Europe and the Middle East.



Dr. Azzam al-Tamimi, head of al-Hiwar TV, with Mohamed Morsi, Muslim Brotherhood leader and deposed Egyptian president (Azzam al-Tamimi's Facebook page, June 30, 2012)

► Al-Hiwar TV collaborates with Hamas' al-Aqsa TV. For example, in **March 2009** Zaher Birawi organized an interview with Isma'il Haniyeh, who at the time was head of the de facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip. In **July 2010**, he broadcast an al-Aqsa TV program about the

¹³ Azzam al-Tamimi was born in Hebron in 1955 and lives in London. He has a PhD from Westminster University in London, writing his thesis on "Islam and the transition to democracy in the Middle East. Horizons and obstacles." He is an academician who heads a thinktank and lectures at institutions of higher learning in Britain. He is thought to be a senior figure in the Muslim Brotherhood and a Hamas supporter. He is also a journalist and appears on media outlets.

convoys and flotillas to the Gaza Strip. Al-Hiwar TV also provided a platform for the organizers of the return marches in the Gaza Strip along the border with Israel.