



THE NEW LEADERSHIP OF HAMAS

A Profile of Khalid Al-Mishal

Yehudit Barsky

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THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

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Cover: Khalid Al-Mish`al, center, continues the Hamas leadership line of his predecessors Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, right, and Abd Al-Aziz Al-Rantisi.

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The New Leadership of Hamas: A Profile of Khalid Al-Mish`al

If the [Islamic] nation would fight the same way [that Palestinians and Iraqis] are fighting in Rafah, Jenin, and Falluja, then, by God, we will defeat both the United States and Israel.¹

Our battle is with two sides. One of them is the strongest power in the world, the United States. And the second is the strongest power in the region [Israel].²

The Arab governments have to stop the Zionist-American plan to control the Arab world. The Palestinians have done their duties and offered martyrs in Palestine and now the Arabs have to unite with the Palestinians.³

Don't wait for what Hamas will do only. Don't be content with this attitude. This battle is led by the criminal [Ariel] Sharon and with him [George W.] Bush and all of America. They are leading it against the entire Umma [Islamic nation]. Don't just wait for what Hamas or Palestinian factions will do. This is your battle.⁴

Hamis leader Khalid Al-Mish`al

The Qassam Brigades swear that their retaliation will be 100 martyrdom attacks in the heart of your homes. We will burn the earth under your feet.⁵

Statement of Hamas's Iz Al-Din
Al-Qassam Brigades
April 19, 2004

Khalid Al-Mish`al was appointed the new leader of Hamas on March 24, 2004. Two days after his appointment, Al-Mish`al demonstrated his movement's fealty to the vision of its founder, the late Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, by reaffirming its central tenet—the destruction of Israel via a holy war or jihad. In remarks to a demonstration of 5,000 Palestinians in Ramallah, broadcast to the crowd via telephone, Al-Mish`al declared: "Hamas is in good health and will continue its jihad and resistance. We will continue our sacrifices until the end of the occupation."⁶ The demonstrators responded with chants of "Death to Israel! Death to Israel!"⁷

Early Years

Al-Mish`al was born in 1956 in the village of Silwad, then under Jordanian rule. Following the 1967 war, when Silwad came under Israeli sovereignty, Al-Mish`al and his family moved to Kuwait to join his father, who had gone there for employment several years earlier.⁸

Al-Mish`al completed his primary education at the Khalid Bin Walid School and the Al-Hariri Complementary School and his secondary education at the Abdallah Al-Salim High School in Kuwait.⁹ Like all of the Hamas founders, Al-Mish`al was initially a Muslim Brotherhood activist. He became a follower of the radical Muslim Brotherhood movement known as *Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimin*, and officially joined the movement in 1971 at the age of fifteen.¹⁰ Continuing his involvement with the Muslim Brotherhood, he headed a student organization at Kuwait University called the "List of the Islamic Right."¹¹ He received a degree in physics from Kuwait University in 1978¹² and lived in Kuwait until 1990. Following Kuwait's expulsion of all Palestinians from that country as retribution for their support of Saddam Hussein's 1990 conquest of Kuwait, Al-Mish`al and his family left for Jordan.¹³

The Growing Prominence of the Hamas Political Bureau

Following Israel's arrest of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin in 1989, Hamas devised a strategy to ensure the continued operation of its leadership. Since the organization's establishment in 1987, Yassin served as its leader and the central address for all of its activities. He received assistance from Muslim Brotherhood activists in Jordan and maintained ties with Musa Abu Marzuq, a close associate from the Muslim Brotherhood who had departed from Gaza to study for his Ph.D. in the United States in 1974.¹⁴

Yassin's involvement in every aspect of Hamas activities and his centralized control over a small, tightly-knit organization were nearly the cause of its downfall. His arrest by Israeli authorities in 1989 demonstrated the extent of his involvement in all aspects of the organization's activities. Yassin was charged with premeditated murder, possession of weapons, incitement, the illegal transfer of \$500,000, assisting the escape of two convicts from prison, recruiting members for Hamas, and membership in an illegal organization.¹⁵ In 1991, Yassin was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment plus fifteen years.¹⁶

The removal of Sheikh Yassin created a vacuum that temporarily destroyed the ability of Hamas to function. In his absence, the second tier of Hamas leadership, including individuals such as Ibrahim Ghawshah and `Imad Al-`Alami, who operated out of the Hamas office in Amman, Jordan, and Musa Abu Marzuq and Ahmad Bin Yusuf, who were living in the United States, rebuilt the organization's infrastructure. Abu Marzuq, one of the most senior leaders of Hamas abroad, became the acting leader of the movement and was appointed as the first chairman of the newly created Hamas Political Bureau in early 1991.¹⁷

The operations of the Hamas military wing, the `Iz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, were transferred abroad, to the responsibility of Abu Marzuq. From his home in Falls Church, Virginia, Abu Marzuq reinvigorated the activities of Hamas by selecting a new leadership cadre in the West Bank and Gaza.¹⁸ He also directed the terror activities of the `Iz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades¹⁹ until his arrest in New York on terrorism charges in 1995.²⁰

Al-Mish`al also played a role in the metamorphosis of a new infrastructure for Hamas. Upon his arrival in Jordan in 1990, Al-Mish`al assumed responsibility for the international fundraising efforts of Hamas at the organization's office in Amman.²¹ After the arrest of Abu Marzuq in 1995, the fifty-member Hamas Consultative Council, or Shura, elected Al-Mish`al chairman of the Political Bureau,²² but the official announcement of his appointment did not occur until eighteen months later, in December 1996.²³ Taking over Abu Marzuq's organizational portfolio, Al-Mish`al also assumed responsibility for the terror activities of the `Iz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, which were relocated to Hamas offices in Amman, Jordan, in 1995.²⁴

Al-Mish`al was reelected political bureau chairman following Israel's targeted killing of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin in March 2004.²⁵ Today the members of the Hamas Political Bureau include Abu Marzuq (who was deported by the U.S. to Jordan in 1997 and returned to resume his activities as the bureau's vice chairman), Ibrahim Al-Ghawshah, Imad Al-`Alami, Muhammad Al-Nazzal, Sami Khater, and `Izzat Rashaq.²⁶

From 1992 until 1999, Al-Mish`al led the Political Bureau from Amman, Jordan. He and three other Hamas representatives—Ibrahim Al-Ghawshah, Sami Khater, and `Izzat Rashaq²⁷ were expelled from Jordan²⁸ on August 31, 1999,²⁹ and from then until 2001 Al-Mish`al divided his time between Doha, Qatar, and Damascus, Syria.³⁰ Since 2001, Al-Mish`al has

directed the organization's activities from Hamas offices located in Damascus.³¹

International Funds and Assistance to Hamas

Since its establishment in 1991, the Hamas Political Bureau has metamorphosed to take on the responsibility of providing logistics and funding for Hamas terror operations. It has also acted as the liaison of Hamas to the Muslim world. As Abu Marzuq's deputy during the mid-1990s, Al-Mish`al served as the Hamas liaison to Muslim and Arab organizations. In December 1993 he participated in the international Popular Arab and Islamic Conference held in Khartoum, Sudan, which assembled an opposition front of Islamist radicals and Arab Marxists to oppose the September 1993 Oslo Accords. The conference was organized and sponsored by the Islamist radical government of Sudan, led by Hassan Al-Turabi. As the Hamas representative to the conference, Al-Mish`al declared that only a jihad would win back Palestinian land.³² Naif Hawatmeh, the chairman of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, declared, "To hell with the Oslo-Washington agreement! We hope the conference will send a clear message--no!"³³

As an integral part of his efforts to garner support for Hamas, Al-Mish`al headed numerous Hamas delegations to Muslim countries that had extended financial support to Hamas. He also maintained the movement's strong ties to Iran by meeting regularly with Iranian leaders, including Iranian President Muhammad Khatami. At a 1999 meeting with Al-Mish`al and other radical Palestinian opposition leaders, President Khatami pledged, "The Islamic Revolution and the people of Iran will be with you."³⁴

Since its founding, Hamas has received funding for its social institutions from various Middle Eastern governments and from private donors. Through the early liaison efforts of

Abu Marzuq and Al-Mish`al, Iran became one of the chief financial sponsors of Hamas. In response to a request by Hamas, the Iranian government agreed to the opening of a Hamas embassy in Tehran in 1992. Iran also promised to provide training for 3,000 Hamas terrorists.³⁵ Iran has continued to provide logistical support for Hamas terror activities via its Iranian Revolutionary Guards, the Pasdaran,³⁶ and via the Hizballah³⁷ movement in Lebanon.

In 1993, Iran promised a budget of some \$30 million to Hamas.³⁸ A 1994 report indicated that Iran provided \$3 million a year to both Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and one thousand families of Palestinian suicide bombers or detainees from both organizations received regular monthly payments from Iran to support them.³⁹ Former CIA Director James Woolsey stated in 1995 that Iran had provided over \$100 million to Hamas, but did not provide details regarding the period of time during which the funds had been disbursed.⁴⁰

More recently, documents captured by the Israel Defense Forces indicate that Iran transferred large sums of money directly to Hamas's `Iz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades. An intelligence report dated December 10, 2000, by Amin al-Hindi, head of the Palestinian Authority's Palestinian General Intelligence, noted the transfer of funds by Iran to Hamas and other organizations opposed to the Palestinian Authority. The sum of \$400,000 was transferred by Iran to the `Iz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades and another \$700,000 to other Islamist organizations opposed to the Palestinian Authority. The document further indicated that the funds were intended to support the `Iz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades and to encourage suicide bombings. The document also revealed "that Hamas leadership in Syria [i.e., the Political Bureau] maintains contact with operatives from the `Iz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades in the Palestinian territories in all matters pertaining to carrying out military [i.e., terror] attacks against Israeli targets."⁴¹

Al-Mish`al spent a great deal of time visiting Baghdad to confer with Taha Yasin Ramadan, the former vice president of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime. From September 2000 through the early months of 2003, the Iraqi government provided awards of \$25,000 to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers, including those of Hamas.⁴² According to the Arab Liberation Front, a Palestinian pro-Ba'athist organization operating within the Palestinian Authority, Hussein's government paid \$25,000 to each family of a suicide bomber, and \$10,000 to other Palestinians killed in clashes with Israeli soldiers, for a total of \$35 million.⁴³

At a pro-Iraq rally called by Hamas in Gaza in early January 2003, the leader of Hamas in Gaza at that time, Abd Al-Aziz Al-Rantisi, called upon Iraqis to use suicide bombings against American forces: "Prepare an army of would-be martyrs [suicide bombers] and prepare tens of thousands of explosive belts. The American aggressors, the American invaders are now on Iraqi soil; therefore, Iraqis must confront them with all possible means, including martyrdom [suicide] operations."⁴⁴

Al-Rantisi continued, "Blow yourselves up against the American army. Bomb them in Baghdad. We say to the United States that their flag will go down while the Iraqi flag shall fly everywhere."⁴⁵ Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmad Yassin echoed the call by urging Iraqis "to destroy every [American] tank, to kill every [American] soldier."⁴⁶

Future Prospects

*You must understand: liberation of the territories from the occupation is only one phase.... We do not distinguish between Palestine of 1948 and Palestine of 1967. Palestine is everything.*⁴⁷

Hamas leader Khalid Al-Mish`al

As a longtime leader and one of the founders of Hamas, Khalid Al-Mish`al has already demonstrated his commitment to preserving the legacy of Sheikh Yassin. While Yassin focused on the local activities of Hamas in Gaza, Al-Mish`al's concern is concentrated on Hamas's place in and its relationship with the Islamic world. He clearly views Hamas as being part of the larger jihad of Islamist radical movements to fight and ultimately destroy Israel and the West. His recent pronouncements indicate that Hamas sees itself as an integral part of the Islamist war against the United States, and Al-Mish`al provides ideological legitimacy to his followers, who view the U.S. as their larger target.

Thus far, however, Hamas has only given its moral support to that larger cause; it remains to be seen whether Khalid Al-Mish`al will expand Hamas's terror attacks to target the broader world.

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