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Hamas' Military Operations in North America

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A NEFA analysis of the Jamal Akal case
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Canadian Plotter

On November 1, 2003, Israeli security forces detained Jamal Akal, a Canadian citizen who had lived in Canada since 1999.¹ On November 24, 2004, Akal pled guilty in an Israeli military court to conspiring to commit manslaughter and receiving paramilitary training. In a plea bargain, he was sentenced to four years in prison.² He was released from prison in August 2007 and returned to Canada.³

The Targets – Jews in the U.S. and Canada

A statement from the Israeli government asserted that "senior Hamas terrorist" Ahmed Wahabe "asked Akal to attack members of the US and Canadian Jewish communities, either by shooting or by bombing their homes and/or cars. Wahabe told Akal (inter alia): 'New York is an easy place to find Jews.'"⁴

Providing additional details, Ofir Gendelman, an official at the Israeli embassy in Ottawa, said, "the Jewish person was supposed to be identified by his clothing, whether he was wearing a yarmulke, an Orthodox dress and so forth."⁵

The Targets – A Senior Israeli Official Visiting the U.S.

The Israeli government further charged that Wahabe "instructed him [Akal] to gather information (via the media) on a senior Israeli official who was arriving in the US. Wahabe instructed him to then monitor the senior Israeli official's movements and attempt to assassinate the official in a sniper attack."⁶

¹ "Hamas-Trained Terrorist, Canadian National, Arrested by ISA," Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Release, December 8, 2003,

http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Akal/MFA_AkalArrested.pdf.

² Josef Federman, "Palestinian-Canadian Convicted of Planning Attacks in North America," *CBC News*, November 26, 2004.

³ Chris Thompson, "Former Israeli Prisoner Back Home in Ontario," *CanWest News Service*, September 1, 2007.

⁴ "Hamas-Trained Terrorist, Canadian National, Arrested by ISA," Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Release, December 8, 2003,

http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Akal/MFA_AkalArrested.pdf.

⁵ Stewart Bell, "A Student of Terror: How a Windsor Man was Recruited by Hamas," *National Post*, September 9, 2005.

⁶ "Hamas-Trained Terrorist, Canadian National, Arrested by ISA," Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Release, December 8, 2003,

http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Akal/MFA_AkalArrested.pdf.

Military Training from Hamas

According to the Israeli government, "three days before Akal was due to return to Canada, Wahabe...taught him how to use an M-16 (including practice shooting near Netzarim). Wahabe also gave Akal theoretical and practical instruction in making bombs."⁷

Instructed to Procure an M-16 in the U.S./Canada

An Israeli government press release on the investigation revealed that "Wahabe asked Akal to use an M-16 that he would purchase in the US or Canada for the aforementioned attacks."⁸ Israeli embassy official Ofir Gendelman maintained that Akal was to buy the gun from a Detroit gang because weapons were harder to procure in Canada.⁹

Instructed to Raise Funds for the Attacks in Canadian Mosques

The Israeli government noted that "Wahabe told Akal to contact people in the mosques that he prayed in in Canada and raise funds, ostensibly for the families of suicide bombers, which he would actually use for purchasing a weapon and financing his expenses in monitoring his prospective targets and in perpetrating the attacks."¹⁰

Additional Information – Akal's Recruitment

Traveling to Gaza in 2003 in search of a bride, Akal met an individual identified in news reports as Mohammed Bashir Abu Matar (aka Abu Sahil), who was later killed by the Israeli military. Discussing the killing of Akal's cousin by Israeli forces, Abu Sahil urged Akal to exact revenge. Abu Sahil then reportedly introduced Akal to Ahmed Wahabe (a.k.a. Abu Osama). Assessing Wahabe's role, Ofir Gendelman said, "He wasn't one of the leaders but he was a recruiter and he had authority to do whatever he did."¹¹

Additional Information – Akal's Familial Ties to Hamas

According to media reports, Jamal's oldest brother, Walid, is a Hamas member who has spent at least 15 years in an Israeli prison. (Notably, five Akal family members have died in "confrontations" with Israeli police and military.)¹² Press reports further note that pictures of now-deceased senior Hamas leaders Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi and Ahmed Yassin hang on the walls of Akal's father's house in Nasariut, Gaza. And, there is Hamas graffiti by the front of his family's house.¹³

⁷ "Hamas-Trained Terrorist, Canadian National, Arrested by ISA," Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Release, December 8, 2003,

http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Akal/MFA_AkalArrested.pdf.

⁸ "Hamas-Trained Terrorist, Canadian National, Arrested by ISA," Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Release, December 8, 2003,

http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Akal/MFA_AkalArrested.pdf.

⁹ Stewart Bell, "A Student of Terror: How a Windsor Man was Recruited by Hamas," *National Post*, September 9, 2005.

¹⁰ "Hamas-Trained Terrorist, Canadian National, Arrested by ISA," Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Release, December 8, 2003,

http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Akal/MFA_AkalArrested.pdf.

¹¹ Stewart Bell, "A Student of Terror: How a Windsor Man was Recruited by Hamas," *National Post*, September 9, 2005.

¹² Stewart Bell, "A Student of Terror: How a Windsor Man was Recruited by Hamas," *National Post*, September 9, 2005.

¹³ Stewart Bell, "A Student of Terror: How a Windsor Man was Recruited by Hamas," *National Post*, September 9, 2005.

Additional Information – A Hamas “First”/Plans to Blame Al-Qaida

In an official assessment of the Akal plot, the Israeli government commented, “this was the first instance in which Hamas sought to perpetrate an attack on Jewish and Israeli targets abroad.”¹⁴

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs press release reported that, seeking to obscure its role in the attack, “Akal said that due to the uniqueness of the attack, he was due to receive the approval of the Hamas leadership in attributing responsibility for the attack to Al Qaida, not Hamas.”¹⁵

Hamas has denied knowledge of Akal; interviewed by a Canadian newspaper, Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zahri claimed, “we have no details about this person Jamal Akal, and Hamas strategy is to fight the occupation inside Palestine not outside Palestine.”¹⁶

Additional Information – The Intelligence Community’s Assessment of the Hamas Threat to the U.S.

Recent Congressional testimonies by top FBI officials provide insight into the Intelligence Community’s assessment of the threat Hamas poses to the U.S.

In February 2005 testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee, FBI Director Robert Mueller acknowledged that “of all the Palestinian groups, Hamas has the largest presence in the U.S. with a robust infrastructure, primarily focused on fundraising,¹⁷ propaganda for the Palestinian cause, and proselytizing.” During that same hearing, Director Mueller acknowledged that Hamas’ “United States network is theoretically capable of facilitating acts of terrorism in the United States.”¹⁸

However, Mueller noted that “it is the FBI’s assessment, at this time, that there is a limited threat of a coordinated terrorist attack in the U.S. from Palestinian terrorist organizations, such as Hamas...We believe that the primary interest of Palestinian

¹⁴ “2003 Terrorism Review,” Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 8, 2004, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Akal/MFA_2003Review.pdf.

¹⁵ “Hamas-Trained Terrorist, Canadian National, Arrested by ISA,” Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Release, December 8, 2003, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Akal/MFA_AkalArrested.pdf.

¹⁶ Stewart Bell, “A Student of Terror: How a Windsor Man was Recruited by Hamas,” *National Post*, September 9, 2005.

¹⁷ Providing details on those fundraising activities, John Pistole, the FBI’s Assistant Director of Counterterrorism, told the House Financial Services Committee in September 2003 that “investigations have uncovered a myriad of criminal activities used to generate funds, a portion of which is then forwarded to NGOs associated with Hamas. Some of the suggested criminal activity include, but are not limited to, drug trafficking, credit card fraud, counterfeit products, fraudulent documents, cigarette tax fraud and stolen infant formula.” See: Statement of John Pistole, Assistant Director, Counterterrorism Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Before the House Committee on Financial Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, September 24, 2003, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Akal/HouseFinSvc_Pistole_09242003.pdf.

¹⁸ Statement of Robert Mueller, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Before the Senate Committee on Intelligence, February 16, 2005, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Akal/SenIntel_Mueller_02162005.pdf.

terrorist groups in the U.S. remains the raising of funds to support their regional goals."¹⁹ Testifying before the Senate Intelligence Committee in January 2007, Mueller indicated that the FBI's viewpoint has not changed:

"Despite calls from al Qaeda's Ayman Zawahiri to Palestinian terrorist groups to don the mantle of the global jihad, most Palestinian groups have maintained their longstanding policy of focusing their attacks on Israel. Additionally, the ongoing factional in-fighting between Hamas and Fatah elements in the Palestinian territories has consumed the attention of most of the Palestinian organizations. The primary focus of U.S.-based Palestinian groups remains fundraising, propaganda for the Palestinian cause, and proselytizing."²⁰

Echoing this conclusion, former senior FBI official Dennis Lormel has remarked, "being that the United States is such a fertile ground for fundraising, it is less likely they [Hamas] would do something because if they were to attack in the United States, it would draw more attention to their activities."²¹

Additional Information – Hamas' Rhetoric

In the past, Hamas has made contradictory statements about its intentions. For example, in March 2004, Hamas leader Sayed Seyam said, "It's not in our policy to target Americans or American interests."²²

Yet in April 2003, now-deceased senior Hamas leader Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi wrote an article titled "Why shouldn't we attack the United States?" in which he stated, "what should we do if the enemy attacks us like he did in Iraq, Sudan, or Libya and other Arab and Islamic countries? Obviously we should attack him according to the divine equation. This is the moral and national duty...but above all – the religious one."²³ Then, in April 2004, Hamas official Khaled Meshaal told a crowd at the al-Yarmouk refugee camp, "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)."²⁴ And in October 2005, Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar warned that President Bush's actions in the Middle East were "placing America in danger," accusing Bush of "shooting innocent populations with missiles" in Iraq and Afghanistan and starting a confrontation "between the West and 1.3 billion Muslims..."²⁵

¹⁹ Statement of Robert Mueller, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Before the Senate Committee on Intelligence, February 16, 2005, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Akal/SenIntel_Mueller_02162005.pdf. Note: Testifying in a federal trial in August 2005, FBI Special Agent Kerry Myers revealed that the Palestinian Islamic Jihad had planned a terror attack inside the U.S. On the witness stand, he said, "I can tell you there was a plot to commit terrorist acts in the United States. It was interdicted, I believe." When pressed for further details, he responded that they were classified. See: Michael Fechter, "Witness: Islamic Jihad Planned Strike in U.S.," *Tampa Tribune*, August 24, 2005.

²⁰ Statement of Robert Mueller, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Before the Senate Committee on Intelligence, January 11, 2007, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Akal/SenIntel_Mueller_01112007.pdf.

²¹ Eli Lake, "Hamas Agents Lurking in U.S., FBI Warns," *New York Sun*, April 29, 2004.

²² "Hamas to Target Sharon, but US not in Firing Line," *Reuters*, March 25, 2004.

²³ Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, "Limaza la nuhasir Amrika?" rantisi.net, April 6, 2003.

²⁴ "Arab States to ask UN to Condemn Rantisi Killing," *Ha'aretz*, April 19, 2004.

²⁵ Interview with Mahmoud al-Zahar, WorldNetDaily.com, October 8, 2005.

Additional Information – Al-Qaida/Hamas Coordination

An affidavit filed in August 2004 by a FBI Special Agent in a Virginia terrorism investigation offers valuable information about operational coordination between Al-Qaida and Hamas:

“Al Qaeda, with a disproportionate number of leaders from Palestinian backgrounds, has exhibited a propensity to use others to collect intelligence or conduct reconnaissance. In previous years, Al Qaeda commanders and officials stationed in western countries, including the United States, have recruited Hamas operatives and volunteers to carry out reconnaissance or serve as couriers. With the increased law enforcement pressure on Al Qaeda since 9-11, there has been a renewed emphasis by Al Qaeda to find confirmed jihadist supporters in the United States by trying to enlist proven members of other groups such as Hamas to make up for the vacuum on the field level.”²⁶

²⁶ In re: Search Warrant of 4502 Whistler Court, Annandale, VA, et al., (E.D. VA.), Affidavit in Support of Search Warrant, FBI Special Agent Shawn Devroude, Filed August 20, 2004.