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Arrest of Hamas Activists who have Undergone Training (1995-1998) in a Military College in Iran, Designated to Serve as Future Military Commanders

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Background

Ismail Jaabari and Mohammad Halef, two Gaza-Strip Hamas activists, were detained for ISA interrogation in March-April 1999 upon their return from abroad, due to information **indicating they have been sent by Hamas for military training in Iran**. Another activist, Khaled Harazalla, from Yabed village in the Jenin area, who was detained (Oct. 1998) upon returning from abroad but eventually released, was detained once again as a result of the interrogation of the above two.

Their interrogation revealed all three had been staying in Iran for 3 years, undergoing extensive military training sponsored by the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps – the IRGC, **in order to train them as future Hamas commanders**.

It should be noted this is not the first time when Hamas military activists are provided with military training in Iran, yet, the extent of training the three had experienced was **the most extensive ever received by Hamas activists until that time**.

This training – as revealed in the interrogation – indicated the ever-tightening Hamas-Iran relationship, as well as an Iranian effort to exert growing influence over Hamas.



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Recruited for training in Iran

Throughout their interrogation the three disclosed that in late 1994 – beginning of 1995, they were each separately addressed by person of contact of military Hamas abroad. The approaches took place where the three resided or stayed during their studies: Halef in the Gaza Strip; Jaabari in Sudan and Harazalla in Jordan.

The persons of contact offered the three to go on an extensive military-officers course, in order to prepare them to serve in future commanding echelons. Once they agreed, they were assembled in Sudan, and were provided with Iranian visas issued in the local Iranian embassy.

Tareq Zayegh, a military Hamas activist who has especially arrived in Sudan from Syria, **briefed the participants on keeping confidentiality and adopting a cover-story**, according to which they are going to study in foreign universities. These steps were designed out of fear of being uncovered by the ISA upon their return. Furthermore, the visas in their passports were not stamped but on a separate paper, so as not to divulge their visit to Israeli authorities.

The three stayed in Iran between 1995-1998 under patronage of Iranian IRGC, and went through a training course participated by six Hamas activists: two from the Gaza Strip, two from the West Bank (apart from Khaled Harazalla, mentioned above, another activist from the Bethlehem area trained with them and did not return to the Territories but settled in Jordan), and two overseas activists.

Training in Iran – curriculum and visits

While on training in Iran, the detainees had participated in the following courses, managed by members of the IRGC – Al Quds Forces:

- 6-8 months – learning the Persian language in school in the town of Ghazvin.



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- **A week-long military training, including shooting with small arms and handling explosives.**
- **An officers' course in a military college in north Teheran, lasting 15 months, during 1996-1997. The course consisted of extensive military-security training, at the end of which the cadets are granted a lieutenant rank. The training is divided into 4 semesters , including theoretical as well as practical contents, such as:**
 - **Military training and physical fitness – weapons lessons; introduction to and handling of explosives; small arms training; navigation and map-reading; topography; field-craft and field-movement tactics; climbing, descending and walking on ropes; parachuting, biking; marine training – swimming, diving, snorkeling and motor boat driving; self defense and judo; military conduct and discipline – drills, saluting, etc.**
 - **Security and intelligence – doctrines of intelligence apparatuses including clandestine activity, technical monitoring, surveillance, confidentiality and personal security; Interpol, cooperation between states; means of communication; clandestine communication; changing of appearance (including changing of Arab appearance into Jewish one in order to facilitate border crossings or executing suicide attacks).**
 - **A course for special attacks and operations – including means of assassinating protected public figures, particularly by vehicles, etc.**
 - **Theoretical studies: exact sciences (mathematics, physics, chemistry), humanities and social sciences (economics, psychology, politics and philosophy), Islamic studies, Shiite studies, ideology and the Iranian revolution.**



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During their training the cadets were visited by Hamas leaders abroad: Khaled Mashal, head of Hamas political bureau, his deputy, Musa Abu Marzug, and other senior officials, among them: Imad El Alami, Osama Hamdan, who was involved in absorbing and hosting of the cadets in Iran, and the Hamas representative in Iran. The visitors said to the cadets that they are the first class undergoing such training, hence, there are more to come.

Throughout the first period of their stay in Iran the cadets were accompanied by Izz al-Din Sheikh Halil, a senior military operative in Syria, in charge of their visit and training in Iran. He accompanied them for three months, teaching them religious studies. Sheikh Halil, a former Gaza Strip resident, had been among the 400 deportees to Marj Alzahur in Lebanon (Dec. 1992), served as head of the secret military service in the Gaza Strip, and after his deportation settled in Syria, and was in charge of directing Hamas military activity in the Territories.

In preparation for returning to the Territories

Throughout this period and before returning to the Territories, the detainees had undergone several debriefs and preparations, which included:

- Communication with unidentified messengers from Sheikh Halil's HQ and phone communication with the HQ itself.
- Designing a cover story, according to which they studied in India and Pakistan.
- Instructions as to further activity in the field, including: establishing separate military infrastructures which are compartmentalized, separated from the Gaza Strip; establishing a security apparatus designated to protect Hamas from Israeli and Palestinian CI activity, and examining ways to smuggle weapons into the Gaza Strip.



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In the summer of 1997 before the cadets were divided into specialties: infantry, artillery, marine and airborne, the Iranians interrupted the training of the six Hamas cadets. Efforts of senior Hamas officials to complete the training were in vain, and the cadets were told they will return to Iran for the rest of the course in the future.

The cadets were compelled to idly wait in Iran, and after a year, their passports were returned to them and they went back to Sudan. The Gaza activists Jaabari and Khalef left from Sudan to India (Sept. '98) for the purpose of strengthening their cover story as students there. They met with Sheikh Halil, who gave them a final debrief before their return to the Territories, and provided them with money for several months'-expenses in India. At that time they studied English and computers, and purchased forged documents of Indian University graduates. From India they flew on to Jordan and Egypt (March-April '99), to be later detained at the Israeli border crossing.

The third interrogee, Khaled Harazalla from Yabed/Jenin, met in Sudan with Tareq Zayegh, Sheikh Halil's assistant. The latter debriefed him and gave him a cover story, of a student in Sudan, and provided him with a forged approval of his studies in Khartum University. From Sudan Harazalla flew to Jordan, and was detained at the Allenby Bridge border-crossing (Oct. '98), but subsequently was released. He was arrested again (April '99) after having been indicated in the interrogation of the Gaza Strip activists, as having been trained in Iran.

Conclusion

The three individuals were indicted for several counts, some of which are: member in an unlawful association; acting on behalf of an unlawful association; contact with a hostile organization and with a hostile organization outside the region; conspiring to undergo arms and



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The three stood trial and were each sentenced to 4.5 years imprisonment and 3 years suspended imprisonment for a period of 5 years. They were released from prison in 2003 and **resumed their activity within Hamas;** a prominent one being Ismail Jaabari, in charge of physical protection of Ismail Haniya, Hamas Prime Minister since 2006. He later served as Hamas security and protection apparatus and in charge of VIP and guest protection in the Gaza Strip. He was killed (Dec. 27, 2008) during the Gaza Operation.
