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The Arrest and Interrogation of a Gaza Strip-based PIJ activist who was operated by the Iranian Intelligence and Hizballah in Lebanon

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## Introduction

In March 1996, Hassan Khawaja was arrested at Rafah Crossing when returning from abroad. Khawaja was born in 1968, a doctor, and a resident of Shati Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip. Khawaja was arrested due to indications suggesting he was recruited abroad and was assigned terror tasks. It should be mentioned that Hassan's brother, Mahmoud Khawaja was the military leader of Gaza Strip-based PIJ until his death in June 1995.

Hassan Khawaja's interrogation revealed a broad network of connections between his organization and Hizballah elements in Lebanon as well as Iranian Intelligence elements who attempted to form a Gaza Strip-based military infrastructure designated to execute attacks under Iranian hospices. In addition, Khawaja passed military trainings in Lebanon.

## Links to Hizballah and trainings in Lebanon

Hassan Khawaja was a PIJ member since 1989. In September 1991, while studying in Algiers, and under the coordination of Syria-based PIJ activists, Khawaja asked to be sent to a Hizballah military terror camp in Lebanon where he was trained in assault rifles (M-16, AK-47), guns, RPGs, and roadside explosive charges. A year later, Khawaja began operating under Lebanon-based Hizballah direction, subsequent to mediation and coordination of his travels (April and July of 1992) to Syria to meet Hizballah activists by a Hizballah activist named Khalil Zin Al Din whom he knew from their studies in Algiers. During meetings,



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**Khawaja brought up the issue of monetary aid for PIJ activity in the Gaza Strip.**

In April 1993, Khawaja departed again to Lebanon for 3 weeks; during this time he met several times with Hizballah elements, including Mouhamad Zin (aka Abu Mouhamad), PIJ-Hizballah coordinator. He also met with Taisir Al Khatib, a Hizballah activist from the Gaza Strip who instructed Khawaja to return to the Gaza Strip, inspect the situation in which PIJ infrastructure is at, and report to him upon Khawaja's next travel to Algiers.

In April 1994, whilst making another visit in Lebanon, Khawaja updated Mouhamad Zin about the current situation of Gaza Strip-based PIJ and asked for assistance to fund the military activity. Zin claimed meeting a difficulty in transferring funds from Hizballah to PIJ, and so he connected Khawaja to Haj Abbas, a representative of the Iranian Intelligence branch in Lebanon. According to Zin, Abbas was able to address the monetary issue. At the same time, the two examined a possibility to smuggle weapons into the Gaza Strip through Egypt or Jordan to be used in PIJ terror activity.

During his visit, Khawaja met twice with Hizballah's secretary general, Hassan Nasrallah, Mouhamad Zin and other Hizballah activists. Nasrallah was interested in the situation of Gaza Strip-based PIJ saying he sees Khawaja to be a POC between Hizballah and organizations in the Gaza Strip.

After Mahmoud Khawaja, Hassan's brother, was killed in June 1995, Mouhamad Zin told Hassan Khawaja Iran will be willing to provide financial assistance for PIJ infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. As a result, Khawaja departed to Syria in September 1995 and from there continued to Iran to meet Ali Juathadi (aka Abu Ahmad), a handler on behalf of the



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Iranian Intelligence. Juathadi passed Khawaja instructions as to Khawaja's future activity in the Gaza Strip after he graduates, and requested him to get familiarized with the territory during the first 3 months of his stay, and only then start gather information on the organization's military capabilities. Another instruction he received was to gather information on PA and Hamas activity. The two decided that within 6 months they will meet again in Syria or Turkey in order to discuss Khawaja's future handling.

### Establishing the HQ and planning ahead

In October 1995 after graduating, Khawaja returned to the Gaza Strip and married his brother's widow. He turned to military PIJ seniors in the Gaza Strip, including Hadr Abbas and Omar Araj, to assist him in establishing a new PIJ military apparatus. He then reported his Iranian handlers about the formation of a PIJ HQ. Three senior activists were placed at the top echelon: Riyad Khashash, appointed as head of the military wing instead of Mahmoud Khawaja, Faiz Bashir, and Hassan Khawaja himself. In his interrogation, Khawaja claimed that the HQ was not able to successfully operate due to Khashish's arrest by the PA security apparatuses shortly after its formation.

Khawaja admitted also that he designated the military HQ several tasks, including murdering Israeli soldiers and ISA personnel, executing mass terror attacks against military targets (Arab-Israelis would aid him in gathering hostile reconnaissance), attacking some of Israel's profitable factories, and attacking Palestinian security forces to revenge their persecution of PIJ activists.

In addition, Khawaja admitted to turn to Riyad Khashash in order to recruit and send activists to train in Iran or Lebanon, and even reported it to his Iranian handlers. He was instructed to wait until he meets again



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Khawaja also mentioned his plan to form and rearrange all of PIJ apparatuses in the Gaza Strip following the exposure, arrest, and killing of many activists by Israel. In addition to the military apparatus, he attempted to form a security apparatus functioned to prevent infiltration of collaborators aiming to obstruct ISA's and the security apparatuses' activity. Moreover, he also attempted to renew the organization's military activity in the West Bank using a military committee operating at the time under his supervision. According to him, he was unable to make real progress in these 2 initiatives.

### The last meeting

In March 1996, Khawaja traveled to Turkey for another round of meetings with his Iranian handler, in which he reported the situation of PIJ in the Gaza Strip. With the help of one of his brothers, Khawaja opened a bank account in the Gaza Strip. His handler promised to transfer hundreds of thousands of dollars to that bank account to fund the military activity whilst establishing factories in the Gaza Strip to be used as a cover for the funding activity.

The meetings in Turkey also dealt with the plan to smuggle weaponry (including M-72 LAW missiles) from Lebanon to the Gaza Strip, with Hizballah's assistance and transfer it through Jordan, Egypt, or the sea. Khawaja offered to establish a weapon and local explosives factory in the Gaza Strip and his handler promised to provide the money to fund the project. Furthermore, Khawaja was asked to set a Consultative Council (Majlis Al Shura) to be funded by Iran and include 3-5 members who had no links to PIJ or Hamas.



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During these meetings the two decided on the means of communication and codes pertaining to medicine (Khawaja's profession), such as 'diabetes patients' to mark Hamas activists, 'medical equipment' to mark explosives, and 'medicines' to mark weaponry. Khawaja was given 2 telephone numbers in Germany and was told that upon his arrival to the Gaza Strip he will receive a telephone number in Istanbul to report his progress. It was decided that if an abrupt severance occurs with Germany-based elements he will have to turn to Haj Abbas (the representative of the Iranian Intelligence branch in Lebanon) as POC. In addition, they also weighed an option of sending Khawaja a high speed transmission device with which he could maintain a secret and encrypted communication with the Iranian Intelligence. As aforementioned, Khawaja was arrested in Rafah Crossing after returning from these meetings.

### Conclusion

Based on his confession and evidences, Khawaja was convicted for being an active member in an illegal organization, carrying out trainings on weapons and explosives abroad, maintaining contact with a hostile organization abroad, and assisting an illegal organization. The court of appeals sentenced Khawaja to 7 years in prison from the day of his arrest, and a seven year conditional jail sentence for a period of 5 years.

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