



## Israeli Security Agency

Exposing a Hamas Cell Specializing in Sophisticated Explosive Devices  
which Executed Attacks in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv - 1998

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#### Background

In October 1998 ISA uncovered a Hamas cell from Jerusalem, whose two leaders had been trained as explosive experts, and specialized in executing attacks through explosive devices operated by remote controls and suspension devices, as well as booby-trapping video tapes with explosive charges.

The cell leaders were trained and directed by Mouhi Aldin Alsharif, member of Hamas HQ in the West Bank and a major explosives expert in Hamas military wing. Having been nicknamed "the second engineer" after walking into Yihya Ayash's shoes (Hamas no. 1 engineer) – he was killed in March 1998 from an explosive car bomb which he had been preparing.

#### Cell leaders and activity

One of the two cell leaders was Rabia Zaghal, born in 1975, resident of Beit Hanina village, single, an electrical engineer; he was destined to become the next generation of Hamas explosives "engineers". Zaghal was trained by Alsharif in preparing sophisticated various explosive devices, inter alia: booby-trapped video tapes, explosive devices activated by remote controls, preparing electrical circuits for explosive devices, and production of improvised explosives from chemicals (mainly TATP).

The second leader was Ihab Bakhirat, born in 1973, from Zur Baher village, married with two children; a former prisoner during the years 1990-1991 and 1993-1995 due to his Hamas activity. Bakhirat was recruited to Hamas in



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**1997, met with Alsharif several times in Ramallah and was trained by him to prepare various explosive devices.**

The two leaders first recruited their brothers to the cell: Ibrahim Bakhirat (born in 1974) and Ashraf Zaghal (born in 1977). Other activists and facilitators were subsequently recruited.

Two weeks prior to being killed, Alsharif gave Ihab Bakhirat 11 booby-trapped video tapes, and ordered him to place them in public sites, parks and phone booths. The cell members planned to place the booby-trapped tapes in lottery and bus stations in Petah Tikva, but in effect did not use the tapes: they removed the explosives from the tapes aiming to use them for other attacks (the empty tapes were seized after the cell was uncovered). However, it appears at least one more cell received these booby-trapped tapes, since in Feb. 1998 one of them exploded in a video-games store in a Netanya basement, moderately injuring a boy.

After Alsharif's death, Zaghal and Bakhirat were transferred to the command of Alsharif's personal aid, Salman Abu Id, born in 1964, resident of Bidu village north of Jerusalem. Salman directed them to execute attacks as a revenge for the death of Mouhi Aldin Alsharif and provided them with Alsharif's tool-box, containing remote controls to operate explosive devices, suspension mechanisms as well as two charges.

### "Crime and punishment"

The attacks carried out by the cell members were:

- Detonating an explosive device placed in August 1998 in a trash can in Allenby Street in Tel Aviv (16 wounded).
- Detonating an explosive device placed in September 1998 in a bus station in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (One wounded soldier).



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In addition, the cell members disclosed in their interrogation plans (that eventually were not realized) to execute attacks of car bombing near a bus station in Mesubim junction (near Tel-aviv); placing explosive devices on the railway in Malha station in Jerusalem and in a gas station in the Beit Shemesh area; a kidnapping attack of a soldier to be used as a bargaining chip.

Central activists of the cell stood trial and were sentenced to various periods of imprisonment:

- **Rabia Zaghal** – sentenced to 24 years in prison for the following: placing explosive devices (two attacks), membership in an unlawful association and military training.
- **Ihab Bakhirat** – sentenced to 13.5 years in prison and 4.5 years suspended for three years, for the following: membership in an unlawful association and military training, possession of arms, attempted possession of arms, and assisting others in placing bombs.
- **Ashraf Zaghal** - sentenced to 16.5 years in prison and 3.5 years suspended for three years from the day of discharge, for the following: military training, attempted possession of arms and assisting others in placing bombs.
- **Ibrahim Bakhirat** - sentenced to 9 years in prison and 2 years suspended prison sentence, for the following: membership in an unlawful association, possession of arms and assisting the activity of an unlawful association.
- **Salman Abu Id** – the Jerusalem cell director, and his cousin, **Salim Abu Id**, were interrogated by the Palestinian security forces following a work-accident in the Betunia village in the Ramallah village in which they were wounded (Sep. 1998). In this accident, **Zaharan Zaharan**, another military Hamas activist from Bidu, was killed.