

Israel Foils Hamas Plot to Violently Overthrow PA

A lengthy operation by the Shin Bet and the Israel Defense Forces thwarted a Hamas plot to overthrow the Palestinian Authority government in Judea and Samaria and carry out terrorist attacks in Israel, the Shin Bet revealed this week.

Working together over the course of months, the Shin Bet and the IDF arrested 93 Hamas members who were operating in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, of whom 46 were transferred to the Shin Bet for interrogation. Weapons and ammunition, including 24 rifles, six handguns, seven rocket launchers and several magazines, were confiscated.

According to the Shin Bet, the planned toppling of the PA was directed out of the Hamas headquarters in Turkey and was assisted by a network of operatives in Turkey and Jordan, who funneled over 2 million shekels (\$569,000) into Judea and Samaria. The money was used to acquire weapons and safe houses. Israeli authorities confiscated more than 600,000 shekels (\$171,000) of the smuggled funds.

Riad Nazzer, 38, of Dir Kadis, was in charge of the plot to overthrow the PA government. Nazzer has served a number of prison sentences for his involvement in Hamas military activity. One of the top Hamas operatives in Ramallah, Nazzer was recruited in March 2010 by Salah Aruri, 48, a senior Hamas operative who has also been imprisoned a number of times. In March 2010, Aruri moved to Turkey as part of an agreement with the High Court of Justice, and since then has been in charge of the Hamas headquarters abroad.

To carry out the plan to oust the PA and commit terrorist attacks in Israel, Nazzer established an extensive military infrastructure in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria. He

recruited numerous operatives through imprisoned Hamas leaders and former Hamas prisoners. Students and academics, particularly those from the chemistry and engineering fields, were also recruited to prepare and store explosives.

The heads of the plot kept in contact with Hamas headquarters in Jordan. Former security prisoner Uda Zaharan, 54, originally from the Jerusalem area, who has been living in Jordan since 2006, handled money transfers and communications with Ramallah.

Another important figure arrested was Majdi Mafarja, 32, a resident of Beit Liqya who holds a doctorate in computer engineering. Mafarja, who served as head of Hamas' security apparatus, was originally recruited in Malaysia and trained in encoding correspondence and cyber warfare. He was arrested on May 22.

Salah Barekat, 35, an Israeli citizen from Beit Safafa near Jerusalem, was also arrested in the sting on July 1. Barekat was a senior operative in the "dawa"—Hamas' social and civilian infrastructure—and was a messenger for the Jordanian network from 2010 to 2012.

"The detainees are from [places ranging from] Jenin in the north to Hebron in the south, from 46 cities and villages," a senior Shin Bet official said. "Exposing the plot shows how deep our intelligence penetrates. Good work was done over a long period of time. This infrastructure didn't carry out any terrorist attack."

The official said characterized the Israeli operation to foil the plot as a "classic pre-emptive strike," and said the plot had operated according to the model that ousted Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party from the Gaza Strip in 2007.

"The plot that has been exposed, one of the most extensive we have known, demonstrates the extreme inherent danger in having

a Hamas command center abroad working with operatives in Judea and Samaria, in light of Hamas' strategic plans to topple the Palestinian Authority," the official said.

A statement from Abbas' bureau said that the PA president had "instructed the Palestinian security forces to obtain all necessary information in light of the news. The arrests of Hamas operatives and the suspicions against them could have dangerous ramifications."

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