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A May 2002 Interview with the Hamas Commander of the Al-Qassam Brigades

On May 29, 2002, the website [Islam Online](#)^[1] posted an interview with **Salah Sh'hadeh**, commander of the **'Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades**, the military wing of **Hamas**, who was assassinated by Israel on July 23, 2002. The following are excerpts from the interview:

How to Choose a Martyr

Q: "How do you choose who will carry out a martyrdom operation?"

Sh'hadeh: "The choice is made according to four criteria: First, devout religious observance. Second, we verify that the young man complies with his parents' wishes and is loved by his family, and that his martyrdom will not [adversely] affect family life - that is, he is not the head of the family and he has siblings, as we will not take an only child. Third, his ability to carry out the task assigned [to] him, and to understand its gravity; and fourth, his martyrdom should encourage others to carry out martyrdom operations and encourage Jihad in the hearts of people. We always prefer unmarried [men]. It is the regional leadership of the military apparatus of the Hamas movement that proposes his candidacy, and then decides whether to accept him."

Seeking Martyrdom Shows Mental Health

Q: "How do you account for the stream of youths [coming] to join the ranks of perpetrators of martyrdom operations? And does this attest to [mental] health or to escape from the frustration and disappointment among the Palestinians?"

Sh'hadeh: "The stream of youths [who seek to] attain martyrdom shows [mental] health and the awareness of Palestinian society, and is not a mistake or an escape from a situation of despair or frustration. Many people come to Jihad, and they are willing to lay down their souls - which is the most precious thing a man has. There is a vast difference between someone who sacrifices money or an offering and someone who sacrifices his soul for the sake of Allah to bring happiness to the nation, and to remove its torment and distress. Nevertheless, we cannot provide everyone with a martyrdom operation because the targets are limited and the enemy positions we want to reach are highly fortified. If some of the youths do not follow the military apparatus's instructions, and [set out on operations on their own] without being linked officially to this apparatus, this proves that the [entire] nation has become a nation of Jihad on the threshold of liberation, and that it rejects humiliation and submission."

How to Choose a Target

Q: "How does the military apparatus choose a target?"

Sh'hadeh: "We have surveillance groups whose role is to monitor Israeli and settler patrols and the movement of the enemy on the border. We utilize every breach we find in the enemy's security fence. Afterwards we define the target and the nature

of the assault on it, whether it is a settlement, a military post, a military vehicle, or anything else. The target is filmed, and then [the video] is shown to a committee appointed by the General Staff of the Military Operations. After the target is approved, the martyrdom operation's perpetrator is trained... Then the operation is ready to go, after a group of experts approves the plan and determines the factors for its success or failure."

If We Kill an Israeli Child It Is Not Intentional

Q: "What about killing Israeli citizens?"

Sh'hadeh: "We do not target children, the elderly, and places of worship, although these places of worship incite to murdering Muslims. Similarly, we have not targeted schools, because we do not give orders to kill children. The same goes for hospitals, although this is easy for us, and attainable. We act according to the principles of Jihad to which we adhere. Our motto is: 'We are not fighting the Jews because they are Jews, but because they occupy our land. We are not fighting them because of their religion but because they have usurped our land. If we kill a child it is not intentional...'"

Costs and Prices of Martyrdom Acts

Q: "How much does a martyrdom operation cost?"

Sh'hadeh: "The cost of an operation varies... Attack operations with automatic weapons cost the price of the weapon, which hold at least 250 rounds, and of the ammunition, and the price of about 10 hand grenades. But some of the operations cost much more and include transporting [the perpetrator]... buying a car, and bribing Jewish collaborators. There are operations that cost a great deal - between \$3,500-\$50,000, in accordance with the target."

Hamas Rockets

Q: "How did you develop the weapons that the 'Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades have come to excel at manufacturing, such as the Al-Qassam 1 and Al-Qassam 2 and the and the Al-Bana [rockets]."

Sh'hadeh: "...We have scientists who specialize in weapons development, who are today studying and conducting experiments on the Al-Bana rocket, which is a combination of an RPG and a LAW [light anti-tank weapon], and differs from the Al-Qassam 2 because it is designed for moderately thick armor. Hand grenades are manufactured to meet the needs of the apparatus and its members, and they have proved their efficiency, and [even] the Zionist Defense Ministry attests that they are powerful grenades. All the grenades and rockets are locally manufactured, easily and simply. The explosives in the Al-Qassam 1 and 2 and the Al Bana are made from simple raw materials. [Even] the women can make them at home..."

The Political Wing Prevails Over the Military Wing

Q: "What about the organizational structure of the 'Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades?"

Sh'hadeh: "In general, the brigades are a small army subject to political decisions, like any [other] army in the world. It has all the kinds of divisions and structures that an army has. We are soldiers. The political apparatus does not tell us, 'Do such and such' and 'Carry out this or that operation!'; the political apparatus is sovereign over the military apparatus, and a decision of the political [echelon] takes precedence over the decision of the military [echelon], without intervening in military operations. The success of an operation is not defined by the number of enemy dead, but by the extent to which our Jihad fighters managed to reach the target, and by the operation's execution. Good planning is vital for the operation's success. The number of dead depends on the will of Allah."

Obstacles Facing Hamas-Scarcity of Weapons and PLO's Political Confusion

Q: "What are the obstacles that the Al-Qassam Brigades face?"

Sh'hadeh: "The most significant obstacles are the scarcity of good-quality weapons, such as anti-aircraft and long-range missiles. Another significant obstacle is the haze obscuring the political position of the National [Palestinian] Authority. This causes confusion in the military wing [because] it does not set a [clear] position


regarding the military operations - that is, whether it is for them or against them. Is it an authority for national liberation, or an authority for autonomy? This matter confuses many Jihad fighters."

"In addition, weapons prices have been raised by the bloodsucker arms dealers, so the price of an M-16 has reached \$5,000, and each of its bullets now costs \$1.50, and a Kalashnikov costs \$2,000, and each of its bullets costs \$4.00. The military apparatus has managed to meet the challenge of weapons scarcities by collecting donations from people who love supporting the path of Jihad for the sake of Allah. Similarly, the movement has succeeded in manufacturing some of the intermediate weaponry, thus reducing costs. The cost of a rocket [made by the movement] is less than 1% of its cost if we had to buy it."

[1] <http://www.islam-online.net/arabic/politics/2002/05/article25.shtml>, May 29, 2002.

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