

**“Interview with Sister Intisar al-Wazir (Um Jihad), Member of Fateh’s Central Committee” in Yakhluḥ, Yaḥyá. *Shahadāt ‘n Tarikh al-Thawra al-Filastiniya*. Ramallah: Sakher Habash Centre for Documentation and Intellectual Studies, 2010 (pp. 41-45). Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.<sup>1</sup>**

After fleeing to Gaza, Abu Jihad attended the school UNRWA had set up. This was when his real suffering started. It started with his family’s financial hardship. His family left behind in Ramla their house, a shop, which was the source of their income, and a hammam his father owned. They didn’t have anything.

When they arrived in Gaza, my father gave them shelter in our house. They stayed with us in our house for about a year and a half. As I mentioned earlier, we are related. Then his family rented their own house to live in.

He continued studying at school in Gaza. He was in the same class as his younger brother.

He studied and worked at the same time. He tried to help his father by contributing to the family’s income. His first job involved selling combs, shavers, scissors, shaving blades and sewing kits out of a box. Everyday after school, he would sit on the pavement with the box selling these things. Then he worked for one of the merchants, while staying in school. Through this work, he managed to save enough to buy a camera. He spent his free time going to refugee camps in Gaza with his camera. He went to Jabalia, Rafah and all the other cities in Gaza Strip. He walked around these places taking pictures. These were places of wretchedness and misery. He took pictures of poor children who often had no shoes or clothes. He took pictures of how Palestinians were living after the occupation uprooted them from their villages and cities. He sent those pictures to Arab magazines and newspapers. He even sent them to the United Nations. He was very active in exposing the suffering of Palestinian people in the camps.

In early 1950s, he started to become more politically aware. In that period there weren’t many political parties in Gaza, and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) was the most prominent party. He joined the MB and absorbed its culture. Like all other parties in Palestine, the MB’s main objective was liberating Palestine. This was just a slogan without practical application. Abu Jihad moved up the ranks of the MB. He became the head of the party’s

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student bureau, supervising student members. He focused all his efforts on educating these youth, raising their awareness, training them to use weapons, etc.

I remember as a child seeing them marching in groups, like soldiers. He walked at the head of these groups in his shorts, with the youth running behind him. They ran long distances in Gaza's streets, especially on the beach. They used to run and walk from Gaza to Nuseirat and Rafah. I felt they had the energy to shape individuals and men. His work with the youth broadened, and he came to believe that Palestine could only be liberated through armed struggle. He believed in the armed struggle, and that only Palestinians could launch this struggle. He started thinking about how to launch the struggle. He detailed his vision in a plan and a strategy that he submitted to the MB leadership. They read the plan and answered "not now". They rejected the idea.

Gradually Abu Jihad withdrew from the MB. The youth followed suit. He started thinking about establishing his own organisation. He recruited a large number of youth. Some of the youth went on to become important leaders in Fateh.

Of these youth, I remember Kamal Adwan, Abu Hesham (Said al-Mezayyen), Mohammad al-Ifranji, Mounir A'azoor, Ahmad Wafi, Abu al-Adeeb, and Riyadh al-Za'anoun. They formed an alternative organisation to the MB. The main concern of this new organisation was launching the armed struggle. The organisation didn't have a name. They would meet, discuss and develop their ideas. One of the most prominent of these youth was Hamad al-A'ydei.

Gaza was under Egyptian administration. This meant direct Egyptian rule. The Gaza Strip was ruled by a resident Egyptian military governor.

They started conducting military operations in that period. Two of the most important operations involved blowing up Zohar water tank in 1953 and 1954. They carried out other explosives operations, and planted mines on roads used by military patrols. They used to infiltrate the occupied territories and attack Israeli patrols or plant mines on the patrols' paths.

Israel's reaction to these operations was violent. One of the most violent reactions was in 1955, when Israel shelled the Gaza Strip savagely and barbarically, killing and wounding many, and destroying many properties.

On that day, Abu Jihad was at al-Saha, which is a main square in Gaza. Next to al-Saha was a cinema called Cinema Samer. Films at the cinema finished at five o'clock, and the audience would exit the cinema onto al-Saha. At the exact moment when people were leaving the cinema, they [Israel] shelled al-Saha with mortars, causing a huge number of casualties. Then they committed a massacre against the Palestine Brigade, a brigade comprised of Palestinian young men and commanded by the Egyptian army. Many were martyred as a result of the Israeli shelling. They also shelled a checkpoint between Rafah and Kahn Younis, wounding and killing many more. Following these massacres, huge demonstrations erupted in Gaza. This was the first time all the Palestinians – men, women, youth and old people – joined the demonstrations. The demonstrators demanded to be armed. The leading figures in the demonstrations were Fathi al-Bala'awi, the poet Mu'in Bseiso, Abu Youssef al-Najjar and Abu Jihad.

During that time, brother Yasser Arafat was head of the Palestinian Student Association in Cairo. They held a sit-in in the association's office to protest against what was happening in Gaza. Abu al-Adeeb, Abu Iyad and Abu al-Lutuf were members of the association. Other groups of students, who later became Fateh leaders, were also members of the association.

They were all members of the association. News of the sit-in reached President Gamal Abdel Nasser. He requested a meeting with the association's leadership. He met with Yasser Arafat. Abu Ammar spoke about the unarmed Palestinian people and the massacres committed against them when they were unable to defend themselves. He proposed that Abdel Nasser arm the Palestinian people. Every point Abu Ammar made was directed towards this goal. Abdel Nasser agreed, and asked them to form a delegation to visit Gaza and compile a comprehensive report of the situation there.

Abu Ammar visited Gaza along with Abu al-Adeeb, and I believe Abu Iyad as well.

During this time, Abu Jihad was the editor of *Filastinuna*, a magazine published in a high school called Filastin.

As a journalist, he went to meet with Yasser Arafat and the delegation from the student's association. He had a lengthy meeting with Abu Ammar and published their conversation in *Filastinuna* Magazine. This was the first meeting between Abu Ammar and Abu Jihad.

Military operations launched from Gaza Strip didn't stop. One time, Abu Jihad joined one of the groups on an operation and they didn't manage to get into the occupied territories, and couldn't plant the explosive device. Abu Jihad didn't want to bring the explosive device back to Gaza. He dug a hole and buried the device, then placed the detonator in another hole nearby.

By chance, an Egyptian camel patrol was passing through the area when the camel tripped on something. The Egyptian soldier dismounted and found the explosive device. They searched the area and found the detonator. They took the explosive device and the detonator to al-Saraya in Gaza.

The officer examined and dismantled the device and discovered it was locally made. There was a piece of metal used to put pressure on the explosives. He took the metal piece and went around Gaza asking every blacksmiths, "Do you know how to make a piece like this?" The blacksmith would answer yes. "Did anyone ask you to make one like it?" The answer would be no.

Eventually he got to a blacksmith in al-Zaytoun neighbourhood who said he had made a similar piece for a young man whose name he did not know. The blacksmith described the young man as dark and skinny. The blacksmith's son was sitting and listening to the conversation. He said, "I know him. His name is Khalil al-Wazir and he's a student at Filastin high school".

That same day, they waited for him outside his house. When Abu Jihad stepped out, they took him to al-Saraya. He didn't know why he was arrested. He had documents about the organisation's activities in his pocket. He asked the officer if he could go to the toilet, and he got rid of the documents while he was there.

His mother and father came to our house and told my father that al-Mukhabarat (the intelligence services) arrested Khalil, and that they didn't why. They started trying to find out why he was arrested, and trying to get him released.

In his office, the officer opened a cupboard and took out the metal piece from the explosive device. When Abu Jihad saw the piece of metal, he knew what the charge was. At that time, Abu Jihad was preparing to sit a culture exam, as it was called; it's an exam one year before the high school examination. His arrest made him miss the exams. He was released 24 days after he was arrested; by then the exams had finished.

He spoke bitterly about that arrest. He said the most humiliating thing they did to him was shaving his head.

They interrogated him to find out who was supporting him; they wanted to know who his partners were. They thought there were powerful forces behind him. He told them he had carried out this act out of his personal sense of patriotism and that his partner was his friend Hamad al-A'yedi. Al-A'yedi had fled to the West Bank when he sensed he was being pursued. This was before Abu Jihad's arrest.

Abu Jihad knew that Hamad al-A'yedi was in Jordan.

All his answers were that only he and Hamad were involved. He was sentenced to exile, but his family and friends intervened on his behalf. He finished his studies and passed Tawjihi [high school exams] with one of the highest six scores in Egypt and the Gaza Strip. At that time, the same examination was administered in Gaza Strip and Egypt. He then left to study Journalism at Alexandria University.