

# GRILLING OF TOP PALESTINIAN MILITANT EXPOSES ARAFAT'S LINK TO TERROR ATTACKS ON ISRAELIS, PAPERS SHOW

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Transcripts of the Shin Bet interrogations of the cagily ambivalent Marwan Barghouti a decade ago show the former PLO leader avoided taking responsibility for terror attacks during the second intifada while bankrolling them.

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On April 15, 2002, 10 years ago this week, Marwan Barghouti, the secretary general of Fatah's Tanzim militia, was arrested by members of the undercover Duvdevan unit of the Israel Defense Forces in Ramallah. His capture was preceded by two weeks of cat-and-mouse games with the IDF and the Shin Bet security service, during which the Israelis also disseminated threatening hints about an intention to assassinate him.

In April and May of 2002, immediately after Barghouti's arrest by the IDF during Operation Defensive Shield, the Shin Bet interrogated him at the Russian Compound in Jerusalem. The records of the interrogation, which are being published here for the first time, were revealed during judicial proceedings that are now taking place and related to civil-damages suits filed against Barghouti and the Palestinian Authority. There are some 50 civil suits brought by victims of intifada violence and their families now pending before Israeli courts, and Barghouti is a plaintiff in many of them, together with the PA. These include a claim by victims of the March 5, 2002, Sea Food Market bombing in Tel Aviv, and others by relatives of Aharon Obadyan and Moshe Dayan, who were killed in attacks in July 2001 and March 2002, respectively. Barghouti's general line of defense is that he does not recognize the authority of Israeli courts.

The records were obtained by Haaretz correspondent Chaim Levinson. They include memoranda by Shin Bet officials written during the course of Barghouti's investigation, which in one instance are also backed up by an extensive and detailed transcript. Haaretz does not have either audio tapes or video footage of the interrogation sessions.

While Barghouti was being questioned, the IDF and the Shin Bet were hunting down the assemblers of explosive devices and dispatchers of suicide bombers in the casbah of Nablus and in the ruins of the Jenin refugee camp. In Rishon Letzion, on May 7, a Hamas suicide bomber blew himself up in the Sheffield Club pool hall, murdering 16 Israeli citizens. Under American pressure, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ended the siege of the Muqata headquarters of PA Chairman Yasser Arafat in Ramallah, and changed his mind about expanding Operation Defensive Shield to the Gaza Strip as well.

Each of the Shin Bet interrogations of Barghouti - who also served as secretary general of Fatah in Judea, Samaria and Gaza; was a member of the Palestinian legislature and founded the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades - went on for hours. Barghouti's partial confessions, which were recorded, were used two years later as evidence to indict him for three terror attacks: the June 12, 2001, murder (due to mistaken identity ) of a Greek Orthodox monk near Ramallah; the murder of Yoela Chen near Givat Ze'ev on January 15, 2002; and a Tel Aviv shooting attack of March 5, 2002, in which three civilians were killed at the Sea Food Market

restaurant. The details Barghouti gave also helped to build a case against other Fatah military activists, who also spoke about him in their own interrogations. However, the court eventually acquitted Barghouti of involvement in additional attacks in 2001-2, which the prosecution was unable to prove.

Barghouti's confessions indicate that PA Chairman Arafat issued a general directive to carry out terror attacks, but made sure not to get personally involved in any way that might incriminate him. Barghouti was convicted in 2004, and sentenced to five concurrent life sentences. Despite his hopes, the senior Fatah leader was not recently released as part of the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange.

At the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa intifada in September 2000, Barghouti - a seasoned political activist who previously had spoken in favor of implementing the Oslo Accords, and marched in demonstrations shoulder to shoulder with Israeli leftists - was drawn into the wave of terror that swept through the territories. According to the court's verdict, he played a substantial role in the barrage of shooting attacks (and later suicide attacks ) initiated by Fatah.

The reasons for this about-face by that organization, whose leader, Arafat, had participated in the July 2000 peace talks at Camp David, were varied. At the basis was the ideological argument advocating the need to return to the armed struggle after the failure of the peace process (Barghouti told his Shin Bet interrogators that an independent state must be achieved through bloodshed ). Furthermore, the more the mass demonstrations in the first month of the intifada deteriorated into exchanges of fire with the IDF, in which the Palestinians suffered dozens of casualties, the greater the desire for taking revenge against Israel.

Barghouti was also motivated to act initially because of competition with fellow Fatah member Hussein al-Sheikh. Within a short time, the severe losses suffered by the Palestinians pushed them to become more extreme in their views, with the Fatah leaders afraid of losing the street to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which spearheaded the spate of suicide attacks. Fatah, led by Barghouti, crossed two red lines in the winter of 2002: Its members began to carry out suicide attacks (something they had refrained from in the past ). They also resumed attacks within the Green Line, as opposed to the declared policy of a battle against the IDF and the settlers only. The wave of attacks in the "Terrible March" of 2002 (with 133 Israeli dead, most of them civilians ) led to Sharon's decision to recapture the cities of the West Bank in Operation Defense Shield. Thus Israel in effect crushed the Arafat-led PA. The Authority emerged from its ruins only two-and-a-half years later, after the death of Arafat and the appointment of Mahmoud Abbas as his successor.

Following are abridged versions of the records from Barghouti's interrogations:

April 21-22, 2002

"The subject," writes the Shin Bet interrogator, who was called "Mofaz," "was interrogated about his activity in directing attacks against Israelis, about the fact that he finances military activity against Israelis, and about murders for which he is responsible. The subject said that in Palestinian society he is considered to be a military commander and also a politician, a leader and an elected official. We explain to the subject that he is not being accused here because of his legitimate political activity, but rather is under interrogation because, as opposed to other public officials, he was engaged in terror attacks."

The Shin Bet officials tell Barghouti that they have sufficient evidence to convict him of murder. Barghouti replies that he is aware of the evidence against him "and knows that it is sufficient for incriminating him, and for sentencing him to many years in prison."

"Mofaz" writes: "We explained to the subject that we believe he is a man of intelligence and long-range political vision, and that we would have expected a person in his position to know how to make the most of things even in his present situation."

Barghouti's replies that he is "interested in ending" the interrogation, but needs time to decide how to do so. The interrogators: We understand that you have decided to confess, but you are hesitating about how to do so. Barghouti "confirmed this and said he wanted to talk about all his activity from his point of view." He has only one request: to meet with then-Shin Bet chief Avi Dichter, or with his deputy (and eventual successor ) Yuval Diskin, before confessing. "There are things that a person in my position has to take care of in terms of the future, for my own interests and those of my men," he says, and adds that he can also help to calm down the security situation. The interrogators first demand "an outline" of the confession.

Barghouti confirms that he was in contact with various regional squads of the military arm in the West Bank. He admits that the activists in the squads asked him for financial assistance and he gave them money. The interrogators say they have testimony from Nasser Awis, the head of the Fatah squads in the Nablus region, who was arrested two days before Barghouti (and later convicted of 14 acts of murder ), about assistance he received from Barghouti. The latter admits: I gave Awis almost NIS 20,000, "but not for terror attacks." You've told us general things, the interrogators tell Barghouti, "parve." For such a confession, we won't humiliate ourselves with Dichter and take him away from his work.

"Mofaz" writes: "The subject asked us not to be angry about the fact that he was speaking generally and explained that he apologized, but now he had to be cautious in his words and not to confess everything. The subject promised that when the Shin Bet chief came (he would confess ) about everything related to money, financing and the purchase of weapons." The interrogators persist: You're trying to downplay your part in the terror activity. Barghouti replies: Ask me any question you want. But when asked more specifically, he says he can't remember everyone who turned to him.

The interrogation begins at 6:45 P.M. and ends at 8 A.M. the next morning. Barghouti, notes the interrogator, "was given cold and hot drinks a number of times, a plate of hummus and a plate of tahini with vegetables and bread, and fruit."

April 23

Barghouti explains to the interrogators that he is still trying to decide about a confession. It's a personal decision, he says. It will greatly affect my political future. The interrogators warn him: The more you delay, the worse your conditions will become. Barghouti tells them about his daily routine as the Fatah secretary general on the West Bank. Every day, he says, people come and ask for financial assistance for various needs - from medical treatment to weapons. I pass on some of the requests to Arafat. When I approve assistance for arms purchases, it is called "personal assistance." The interrogators request a

confession "on the specific rather than the general level. Barghouti: Give me an example. If the accusation is correct, I will confess to it and accept responsibility, as proof of the honesty of my intention to end the interrogation.

The interrogators mention the name Radaida. Barghouti confirms that the man, Ismail Radaida, is known to him - a confirmation that will later cost him the first of the life imprisonments to which he is sentenced.

According to Barghouti, Radaida came to him and asked for help in carrying out a suicide attack. Barghouti told Radaida that Fatah did not carry out such attacks, but referred him to Mohand Diriya, one of the senior members of the PA's Force 17, which guarded Arafat. Shortly afterward he was told that Radaida had killed a Greek Orthodox monk. That murder was a mistake. The Fatah men thought the monk was Israeli because of the car he was in.

"Ismail comes and says to you: I have a few people with me ..." says the interrogator, describing the event to Barghouti [the citations from this interrogation appear in a full verbatim transcript].

Barghouti: "No, he didn't say anything to me. Ah, maybe he does say a sentence to me."

First interrogator: "A sentence, what was it?"

Barghouti: "And he left immediately, that's it."

First interrogator: "I want to carry out terror attacks?"

Barghouti: "Yes."

First interrogator: "What did he say?"

Barghouti: "I really don't remember. That is, I don't remember exactly what he said."

First interrogator: "Say it generally."

Barghouti: "He wanted training ... He wanted to carry out an attack."

First interrogator: "Concentrate and try to remember."

Second interrogator: "Give him a minute. Let him think for another minute and we'll wait."

Barghouti: "That's probably how it was."

First interrogator [who conducts the rest of this exchange]: "Are you saying that Mohand (Diriya) - you knew him from Force 17 - had people with him and in the past they had carried out attacks."

Barghouti: "Correct."

Interrogator: "And what's your connection with Mohand?"

Barghouti: "There's nothing."

Interrogator: "So how do you send him to him?"

Barghouti: "That's why ..."

Interrogator: "Forget it, you're behaving like a small child."

Barghouti: "What does that mean?"

Interrogator: "A moment ago you said that they knew that he had carried out attacks in the past."

April 24

Barghouti tells the interrogators that he's convinced that in the future there will be peace between the two peoples. The second intifada, he believes, will be the last round of violence, because the Palestinians feel they have restored their self-respect by means of the terror attacks. A balance has been created between the

sides, as happened to Israel with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat after the Yom Kippur War.

Barghouti recounts his many press conferences "with great love," as the interrogator puts it, and describes Arafat as his direct commander. "For example, when the rais wanted a cease-fire," writes the interrogator, "he would turn to many people, including the subject, in order to ensure that activity on the ground would cease - whereas when the rais wanted the activity to continue, the activists, including the subject, understood that from certain reactions or non-reactions of the rais."

Barghouti refuses the interrogators' demand that he explain what reactions he was referring to. He talks about his ties with Ahmed Barghouti, his assistant and bodyguard, who was arrested along with him, and was later convicted of a series of attacks. (Ahmed Barghouti was nicknamed "The Frenchman" in Fatah, because of the style of his beard. )

The interrogator writes: "The subject says Ahmed in effect coordinated military activity and was connected to a number of squads, but the person claims that he himself is unfamiliar with the details, although he knows Ahmed is responsible for many attacks." Marwan Barghouti provides relatively extensive descriptions of his ties with senior members of Fatah's military arm in the various regions: "The Frenchman" and Nasser Abu-Hamid in Ramallah, Raed Karmi in Tul Karm and Nasser Awis in Nablus.

Barghouti describes a temporary cease-fire that was agreed upon on December 16, 2001, when U.S. envoy Gen. Anthony Zinni arrived in the region. On Arafat's orders, says Barghouti, I coordinated a cessation of the attacks with Khaled Meshal of Hamas and Ramadan Shalah, leader of Islamic Jihad, both in Damascus. The violence was renewed in full force a month later, after Israel assassinated Raed Karmi. Barghouti admits that in the mourners' tent erected in Ramallah in Karmi's memory, he told Ahmed Barghouti and those present that Karmi's death had to be avenged. "And in fact that same day or the following day Ahmed arranged a shooting attack near Givat Ze'ev that killed an Israeli civilian. After the attack Ahmed reported to the subject of this interrogation."

Marwan Barghouti says he transferred money from Arafat to Raed Karmi and personally gave money to Nasser Awis. The interrogators urge him to make a full confession of his involvement in terror attacks. Barghouti is still hesitant. He is afraid that "cooperation with the interrogation will be to his detriment in his future political career among his people." At the end of the interrogation the interrogators allow Barghouti "to leaf through the Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper where the tree depicting the Tanzim structure appeared."

April 24-25

Barghouti is brought back that same evening for another interrogation. The Tanzim secretary general describes the intifada to his interrogators as "a struggle to get rid of the Israeli occupation," and at the same time as a struggle between Fatah and the Islamic organizations over domination of the Palestinian street. He says, I was in favor of an uncompromising struggle against the occupation by any means; a battle in the territories, against the army and the settlers.

Barghouti tells of a 17-year-old girl, "Riham," who spoke to him several times over the phone and asked him to help her carry out a suicide attack. He says he told her: When you grow up and finish your studies, you can make a sacrifice. He

referred her to his assistant, Ahmed Barghouti, "to talk her out of it." In another case, he admits that he gave \$10,000 to Ahmed to buy weapons. With the money he bought two M-16 rifles and two pistols, which were kept in Marwan's office. The interrogators ask about the attack in the Sea Food Market Restaurant. Nasser Awis of Nablus sent a terrorist who fired at guests of the Tel Aviv restaurant and murdered two civilians and a policeman by stabbing them with a knife. Arafat, says Barghouti, was very angry it happened in Tel Aviv. Barghouti denied to Arafat that he was connected to the attack, but afterward sent a messenger to Awis to report to him about Arafat's anger and to instruct him in the name of the rais to stop the attacks within the Green Line. I take full responsibility for the Fatah attacks, says Barghouti to the interrogators, but not for the attacks within Israeli territory.

The intifada, says Barghouti to the interrogators, "was supposed to be a popular uprising, but things got out of hand." He enumerates the reasons that, in his opinion, impelled the Palestinians to resort to violence: the expansion of the settlements, the loss of hope for peace after the failure of Camp David, Arafat's failure to keep his promise to attain independence, PA corruption and the refugee problem. He says that the riots that erupted on the Temple Mount after Sharon's visit there in September 2000 were not the reason for the intifada, "but the straw that broke the camel's back."

"At the end of the interrogation and before the subject went down to his cell, he asked whether the memo I had written would serve as evidence in court," writes the interrogator, "Emil". "I explained that during the [hearing on] extension of his custody, the memo would be part of the classified material" and would later be presented again after the indictment was submitted.

"The subject reacted and said that in court he would deny that he had confessed to me. I made a request of him that if he did so then at least he should emphasize that I'm not a liar. The subject laughed."

The interrogation lasted for 12 and a half hours. Barghouti, notes Emil, "was given hot and cold drinks, two pieces of toast with yellow cheese and Bulgarian cheese, a tomato and spearmint. He was also given yogurt."

April 26 and 28

"Just as I was a fighter for peace, I'm a fighter against the occupation and against the settlers during the intifada," says Barghouti to the interrogators. He speaks of the purchase of 15 weapons for the purpose of terror attacks and about a failed attempted by Fatah members to fire a mortar in the Ramallah area. Barghouti is asked about Jihad Jaara, a member of the Palestinian security apparatus in Bethlehem who was involved in attacks. Jaara, he replies, "commands the squads and about a month or two ago turned to the subject by phone and requested financial assistance for activity. Since then it is Ahmed Barghouti who conducts the relationship with Jihad. At the same time Ahmed reported to the person under interrogation that Jihad's people planned to carry out a suicide attack in Jerusalem. The interrogatee says he told Ahmed there was no problem, but orders that the attack not be carried out from inside Israel, but in the occupied territories. He says that he (later ) received a report from Ahmed that the suicide attack had failed and two members of the squad were killed ... The subject notes that, in effect, all the activity is carried out by the Fatah

organization and the entire issue of names - Tanzim, Shuhada al-Aqsa - is of no significance. We're talking about Fatah."

"It should be noted," write the interrogators, "that the subject has a well-developed sense of humor and provided us with a number of great jokes."

May 1-2

The interrogators pressure Barghouti to reveal what he knows about the Sea Food Market incident. "The subject mentioned that he did in fact know prior to the attack that it was under way. He found out from Ahmed Barghouti and he himself instructed Ahmed that the attack be carried out only in the occupied territories and that it be carried out either in a settlement or at a military checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem." Both Barghoutis discussed the issue and then, Marwan testifies, he "went back to his own affairs and went to sleep."

The following morning (on March 6, 2002 ), Barghouti he spoke to Ahmed, who reported that the attack had taken place in the end in a Tel Aviv restaurant. "The subject was very surprised" and invited Ahmed for a clarification. The young Barghouti said that "Nasser Awis' boys did in fact try to achieve the objective, but because of some problem they decided to transfer the attack to Tel Aviv."

May 5 and 6

Barghouti is asked about the "Hadera attack," a shooting at a bat-mitzvah party in Hadera, where six people were murdered, in revenge for the assassination of Raed Karmi. He tells the interrogators that he "spoke with Mansour Sharim [Karmi's successor in the Fatah leadership in Tul Karm] a few days later, and Sharim told him that they had been involved in the attack. He claims that he told Mansour that he understands their activity is a reaction to Karmi's death, but the attack inside Israel is a sensitive issue and in contradiction to Fatah policy." Barghouti admits that he transmitted a request to Arafat from Sharim for financial assistance to the tune of NIS 6,000.

Barghouti says that he "was among those who decided that the uprising was a tactic that would constitute a bridge to basic peace, rather than a strategic decision, and therefore he presented a policy calling for a struggle against the occupation inside the territories."

Based on interviews that Haaretz conducted in the past with intifada leaders affiliated with Fatah, both in prison and outside, Barghouti is the only person in the West Bank who can be seen as having deliberately initiated and planned activities at the beginning of the conflict. In recent years Barghouti admitted in talks with Israeli visitors in his cell that he is aware of the fact that the decision to use weapons was a mistake.

During the next interrogation, on May 6, "It was explained to him that his partial, interrupted and prolonged confession did not do him credit. As a leader he has to take responsibility for his actions and those of his people."

The Shin Bet people are still looking for clear proof of Arafat's connection to the attacks. "In response to my question he replied that he had not informed Arafat about the attacks that were under way or after they were carried out. There were many activists who did so in order to score points with the chairman and to obtain money," writes the interrogator. Barghouti explains that he felt an obligation to participate in terror activity "so that in the future he could point to himself as someone who worked both for peace when necessary and in war." In

that way, he says, he will gain the affection of the Palestinian public at the expense of other leaders who refused to dirty their hands.

The Palestinians, adds Barghouti, have no need of diplomatic presents from the Israelis. "A state has to arise (on its own) and part of that process is bloodshed."

May 10 and 11:

Barghouti claims he never received specific instructions from Arafat regarding attacks, the interrogator writes. "But from the very fact that Arafat expressed opposition to carrying out attacks inside Israel, had he been opposed to the armed struggle inside the territories against the occupation, he would have made sure to transmit a specific order about that to all those involved. In addition, the interrogatee notes that he understood from that that he could act ... He repeatedly emphasized that conducting the activity during the uprising could not have continued without Arafat's financing, because all the money that reached the activists came from one source, Abu Amar [Arafat]. He claims that Arafat acts in response to events, in terms of how they serve the Palestinian interest, while each faction in the armed struggle understands the situation based on Arafat's reaction to the carrying out of the activity. I explained to the subject that he also understands that until he tells the truth about Abu Amar's part in launching attacks, his interrogation won't end."

Barghouti: There was no need for direct instructions from Arafat. Things were understood between the lines.

"When Arafat would call for a cease-fire, he would convene the heads of Tanzim and instruct them and add that if the cease-fire were to end, they knew what they would have to do, when it was clear to everyone that he was talking about a continuation of military activity."

One of the interrogators tells Barghouti that the senior Fatah activists are saying that the intifada was also directed against the PA. It is possible that we made mistakes in conducting the intifada, says Barghouti, "but it's as difficult to change Abu Amar as it is for a son to change or criticize his father's behavior."

May 11-14

The interrogators say that in a polygraph test Barghouti was found to be lying on the question of whether he received direct instructions for attacks from Arafat.

"It was explained to the subject that he is a liar and is behaving childishly."

Barghouti insists: You don't understand how Abu Amar operates. That's Arafat's nature. He doesn't say specific things. Had he wanted a stop to the intifada and the attacks, he would have done so. You're trying to cover up for the chairman, the interrogators tell Barghouti, for fear that you'll be accused later of betraying the Palestinians.

Barghouti is asked again about the role of Ahmed Barghouti and Nasser Awis in the attacks. Both, he says, reported to him after the fact on the attacks in Givat Ze'ev, Hadera and the Sea Food Market. Ahmed Barghouti also bought weapons for him that were transferred to Fatah squads. "We didn't go into detail," claims Marwan.

In the next meeting with the interrogators, Barghouti complains that the Shin Bet deliberately leaked information to the effect that he had admitted in previous interrogations that he received instructions for attacks from Arafat. His attorney told him about it. That was manipulation on your part, he accuses the interrogators. They are unable to get more incriminating information from him

about Arafat's involvement in terror. The conversation takes on a historical perspective. "Both sides made mistakes in their conduct. But what caused the failure of the peace process was mainly the murder of Yitzhak Rabin," says the interrogator "Robert," summing up the words of the Palestinian official and terror activist. The time is 7:30 A.M. This last interrogation had gone on for for 11 and a half hours.

Ten years later

Marwan Barghouti will soon be 54 years old. Ten years in jail have not been kind to him, although in recent years he has been more diligent about working out. He reads Hebrew newspapers, watches television (when he isn't in solitary confinement ) and maintains close contact with other PA leaders. Occasionally family members or his attorney Elias Sabag come to visit. According to all the public opinion polls in the territories, Barghouti is still seen as the certain successor of Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen ). Barghouti's views are hawkish compared to those of Abbas, and only recently he called for stopping Palestinian security coordination with Israel.

His attorney Sabag refuses to comment on the texts of the Shin Bet interrogations, because, "not everything that is written in them is correct. Since the age of 17 Marwan has never signed a confession, and in any case we don't recognize the authority of the Israeli court." Sabag claims that Barghouti has yet to make a decision as to whether to run for the presidency of the PA. He says that Palestinian politics are presently three-sided: PA chair Abbas, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and Barghouti. "As long as the third side is in prison, the triumvirate does not function well."

Sabag avoids replying on behalf of Barghouti as to the possibility of Fatah's renewing the armed struggle, and says: "I can't say in his name whether he regrets the intifada. Today, like the entire Palestinian leadership, he supports the idea of the nonviolent popular struggle. Israelis also participate in those demonstrations. I can only say that he's a great believer in the two-state solution. He considers it an acceptable and feasible solution."