

Query response a-6968 of 19 October 2009

Egypt: Harassment of suspected supporters of Palestinian activities; Background Information on connections of Palestinian activists (Hamas) to Syria and foreign relations between Egypt and Syria

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Please read in full all documents referred to.

Non-English language information is comprehensively summarised in English. Original language quotations are provided for reference.

Harassment of suspected supporters of Palestinian activities

On 10 October 2009, Reuters reports on the detention of 24 members of the opposition Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The group had organised protests in support of Palestinians in Jerusalem:

"Egyptian police detained 24 members of the opposition Muslim Brotherhood on Saturday, sources from the outlawed group and the Interior Ministry said. The arrests come a day after protests organised by the Brotherhood, Egypt's largest opposition group, in support of Palestinians protesting in Jerusalem against perceived attempts by Jewish religious activists to enter a holy site in the city.

The group won roughly a fifth of seats in the lower house of parliament in 2005, but Egyptian authorities have since obstructed its efforts to further its electoral gains in votes for municipal councils or parliament's upper house. Police raided the homes of five senior Brotherhood members in and around the Nile delta city of Damanhour and detained them at dawn, a Brotherhood source in the Beheira province said.

Two other Brotherhood sources said 16 members of the group were detained in Sharqiya province, also in the delta, and three in the Suez province further east. An Interior Ministry source confirmed the detentions and said those held had been organising demonstrations without the ministry's permission.

The Brotherhood said on its website that the arrests in Sharqiya were a direct result of more than 120 rallies in that province involving 20,000 people and organised by the group to 'demonstrate solidarity with the Palestinians and to voice anger at the barbaric measures' of Israeli police in the past week. Palestinians in east Jerusalem and the West Bank observed a general strike on Friday called by the Palestinian Authority after clashes at the flashpoint al-Aqsa mosque two weeks ago.

Egypt rounded up hundreds of Brotherhood members in January during Israel's assault on Gaza, when the group brought thousands onto the streets in a campaign supporting Gaza's Hamas rulers, with which it shares historical and ideological ties.

The Brotherhood, which the government has banned but allows to operate relatively openly, seeks an Islamic state through democratic means. It is one of the largest and oldest Islamist groups in the world, and has eschewed violence for decades." (Reuters, 10 October 2009)

A number of sources report on measures by the Egyptian security forces and the judiciary against supporters of Palestinians and especially the governing Islamist group Hamas in the Gaza Strip during and after the Israeli military operation in December 2008/January 2009:

According to a Human Rights Watch report published on 21 January 2009, the Muslim Brotherhood has reported that 860 of its members have been arrested in recent days in connection with demonstrations protesting Israeli actions in Gaza:

"In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has reported that 860 of its members have been arrested in recent days in connection with demonstrations protesting Israeli actions in Gaza. A January 16 demonstration in Tanta, north of Cairo, reportedly drew 15,000 participants. Police arrested eight journalists and beat some of them on December 31 while they were covering a demonstration in support of Gaza in Cairo's Tahrir Square. They were later released. Also in Cairo, police on January 16 prevented a planned demonstration near the US embassy and arrested some activists gathering near the embassy. In the Sinai, police arrested Ashraf al-Hifni and Ashraf Quwaidir, local leaders of the opposition Taggamu' Party, after a demonstration in al-Arish at which security forces say demonstrators started throwing stones at them. They were reportedly charged with participation in an illegal demonstration, injuring three police officers and handing out flyers. The Muslim Brotherhood says 160 of the 860 persons arrested have been formally charged with participation in an illegal demonstration." (HRW, 21 January 2009)

Three weeks before, in December 2008, Reuters reported on the detention of 23 members of the Muslim Brotherhood who wanted to express solidarity with Palestinian Hamas Islamists in the Gaza Strip:

"Egyptian police detained 23 members of the Muslim Brotherhood opposition group who were on their way to attend an event to express solidarity with Hamas Islamists in Gaza on Tuesday, security officials said. The officials, speaking on the customary condition of anonymity, said police detained the Egyptian Islamists in Cairo before a planned seminar at the Doctors' Union. One official put the number of those rounded up at 25. The

Brotherhood, Egypt's strongest opposition group, has historical and ideological ties with Hamas, the Islamist group Israel has targeted in massive air attacks in the Gaza Strip over the past four days. The Egyptian group has been campaigning against the Israeli and Egyptian blockade of the Palestinian coastal strip, ruled by Hamas since June 2007. Israel says the blockade is meant to prevent Hamas from obtaining weapons." (Reuters, 30 December 2008)

In March 2009, Amnesty International (AI) reports on the fate of Dia' el Din Gad, an Egyptian citizen who had been arrested on 6 February 2009. He was brought to the State Security Investigations (SSI) service and interrogated about his participation in protests in solidarity with the people of Gaza during Israel's military campaign in December 2008/January 2009, about Egyptians suspected of having entered Gaza during the conflict, and about whether he has any connections with the Palestinian group Hamas:

"Dia' el Din Gad was transferred to al-Qota Prison in Giza, on the outskirts of the capital, Cairo, on 24 February, and was able to meet his family and lawyer there on 7 March. He is receiving treatment from the prison doctor. He is not known to have been charged with any offence, and is most probably held under an administrative detention order from the Minister of Interior, under the Emergency Law. He complained that he was treated disrespectfully on his arrival in the prison and went on hunger strike on his first day there to demand better treatment and a cleaner cell. He abandoned the hunger strike after two days, according to his lawyer, after he was satisfied that his demands had been met. Following his arrest on 6 February, Dia' el Din Gad was taken to the branch of the State Security Investigations (SSI) service in the city of Tanta, where he was kept for one day. He was then transferred first to the SSI headquarters in Lazoughly, in central Cairo, and subsequently to a major SSI facility in Nasr City, in the north-east of Cairo. During interrogation, SSI officers repeatedly threatened to torture and otherwise ill-treat him, and other detainees were apparently brought in front of him and tortured with electric shocks. He was kept constantly blindfolded and heard screams of people who, it appeared, were being tortured. Dia' el Din Gad was not beaten but verbally abused and told he would never be released. He was given no access to medical attention, despite a pre-existing condition which affects his breathing and for which he takes painkillers and other medication. Dia' el Din Gad was interrogated about his blog, about his participation in protests in solidarity with the people of Gaza during Israel's recent military campaign there, about Egyptians suspected of having entered Gaza during the conflict, and about whether he has any connections with Hamas. He was also questioned about his involvement with Egyptian protest movements, including the Egyptian Movement for Change, known as Kefaya (Enough), and the 6 April Youth movement. Amnesty International considers Dia' el Din Gad a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression, who should be released immediately and unconditionally." (AI, 13 March 2009)

Also in March 2009, the Lebanon based newspaper Daily Star reported that Magdi Hussein, secretary general of Egypt's suspended Socialist Labor Party, and two others had been sentenced to prison terms by a military tribunal for "infiltrating" into the Gaza Strip. Hussein

had been criticising the Egyptian policy of closed borders towards the Palestinians during the Israeli military campaign in the Gaza Strip:

"Magdi Hussein, secretary general of Egypt's suspended Socialist Labor Party, has been sentenced to two years in prison by a military tribunal. Hussein, along with two others, was charged with 'infiltrating' into the Gaza Strip following Israel's recent campaign against the coastal enclave. Protests against his arrest continue to be ineffective. 'It was an illegitimate, vindictive sentence for which there is no moral or legal excuse,' Gamal Fahmi, managing editor of opposition weekly Al-Arabi al-Nassiri, and board member of the Egyptian Journalists Syndicate told IPS. Hussein was arrested by Egyptian authorities on February 1 while returning to Egypt via the Rafah crossing, the sole transit point along Egypt's 14-kilometer border with Gaza. Hussein was on his way back from a weeklong visit to the territory, still reeling from Israel's military campaign from December 27 to January 17. 'People are free to travel from one country to another,' Hussein told independent daily Ad-Dustour after his arrest. 'When did it become a crime to visit our besieged Arab brethren?' While in Gaza, governed by Palestinian resistance faction Hamas, Hussein witnessed the destruction wrought by Israel's recent campaign, during which over 1,300 Palestinians, two-thirds of them civilians, were killed, and infrastructure demolished. Hussein visited numerous bombed-out mosques and homes, as well as the badly damaged Palestinian Parliament building, Gaza's Islamic University and the Shifa Hospital, teeming with critically wounded civilians. While in Gaza, Hussein also spoke to the Hamas-run Al-Aqsa television channel and Sawt al-Aqsa radio station. In live interviews, he criticized Egypt's official stance vis-a-vis the conflict, particularly Egypt's insistence on keeping the Rafah border crossing closed to both people and badly needed humanitarian aid. Ever since Hamas wrested control of the strip in the summer of 2007, Egypt - like Israel - has mostly kept its border with the territory sealed. Despite the increasingly desperate need for food, medicine and fuel supplies among Gaza's roughly 1.5 million people, Egyptian authorities have continued to keep the border sealed both during and after the conflict. Given the sensitive nature of the border area, which has come under frequent Israeli attacks in recent weeks, Hussein's expedition was not treated lightly by the authorities. On February 5, he was brought before a military tribunal in the canal city of Ismailiyya on charges of 'illicitly infiltrating across Egypt's eastern border.' Independent daily Al-Bedeel reported the next day that Hussein's lawyers had been banned from the courtroom and his defense would be conducted by three state-appointed military attorneys. In a second court session on February 11, Hussein was slapped with a sentence of two years in prison in addition to a monetary fine. Outside the courtroom, security forces reportedly beat back dozens of Hussein's supporters who had gathered to protest the harsh verdict. One day earlier, two other activists - Ahmad Dumma and Ahmad Kemal Abdel-Aal - received one year in prison each on charges of 'infiltrating' into the Gaza Strip. On February 12, the Journalists Syndicate organized a protest march in front of the syndicate's Cairo headquarters to express its disapproval of the stiff sentencing. 'We strongly reject the trying of civilians before military courts,' Mohammad Abdel-Qaddous, head of the syndicate's freedoms committee, was quoted as saying by Al-Bedeel. 'The committee will do whatever it can to secure Magdi's release.' According to Fahmi, the court's accusations against the defendants have no basis in Egyptian law. 'There's nothing in Egyptian law

about 'illicit infiltration' over the borders,' he said. 'Egyptians are frequently caught trying to immigrate to Europe illegally, and they are merely questioned and released - not sentenced to prison on charges of 'infiltration.'" Fahmi went on to say that, aside from a small protest march and a handful of angry statements, the Journalists Syndicate had done 'nothing at all' to help Hussein, who was himself a syndicate board member from 1999 to 2003. 'Most of the syndicate's board members are also members of the ruling National Democratic Party,' Fahmi said. 'Their positions, therefore, generally reflect their affiliation to the regime rather than their loyalty to the syndicate or to their fellow journalists.' The trial hardly represents Hussein's first brush with the law. He was arrested twice in the past - in 1985 and 1991 - for organizing protests against normalized relations with Israel and the first US-led war against Iraq. From 1987 to 1990, Hussein was an MP for Egypt's Islamist-leaning Socialist Labor Party (SLP), established in 1978. In 1993, he became editor in chief of the party's daily newspaper Al-Shaab. Four years later, Hussein was made party secretary general. In 2000, state authorities shut down Al-Shaab after it ran a series of articles critical of high-level government officials and officially suspended the SLP. Despite a number of subsequent administrative court rulings overturning the decision, the party has remained suspended, and Al-Shaab banned. Even after the party's suspension, however, Hussein continued to be a vocal critic of Egyptian state policy, especially as it pertained to the long-running Israel-Palestine dispute. During Israel's recent assault on the Gaza Strip, Hussein blasted the regime's approach to the crisis, which he said favored Israel at the expense of the Hamas-led Palestinian resistance. In the first days of the campaign, Hussein told IPS that there had been 'indications' of Egyptian coordination with Israel in advance of the attack. Hussein's wife, Naglaa al-Qalioubi, told Ad-Dustour the harsh verdict represented 'a settling of scores' between the government and her husband. 'It also has to do with the fact that Magdi was planning to call for a peaceful march on February 25 calling for [President Hosni] Mubarak to step down,' she was quoted as saying on February 12. According to Fahmi, the stiff sentence constitutes a warning to other would-be Gaza sympathizers. 'It was a message to others not to make any show of solidarity with the people of Gaza, the way Magdi did.' The use of military tribunals is permitted under the terms of Egypt's controversial 28-year-old emergency law. In 2007, a constitutional amendment gave the president the additional right to refer civilians to military courts if the case in question 'has a bearing on Egypt's national security.' Last year, 40 members of the Muslim Brotherhood opposition movement were brought before a military tribunal on charges of money laundering and promoting terrorism in a months-long trial that ended with stiff jail sentences for most of the defendants." (Daily Star, 4 March 2009)

In June 2009, the Daily Star reports on the detention of three leading members of the opposition Muslim Brotherhood. One of the men, Gamal Abdel-Salam, had been detained in December 2008 for almost two months after the government accused him and two others of "forming a jihad group" linked to Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas:

"Egyptian police detained three leading members of the opposition Muslim Brotherhood on Sunday, including a member of the group's executive Guidance Council, the Brotherhood said. The Brotherhood is Egypt's most powerful opposition group, and seeks an Islamic state through democratic means. It is one of the largest and oldest Islamist groups in the

world. The group has officially been banned since 1954 when one of its members allegedly tried to assassinate Gamal Abdel-Nasser. It has, however, been tolerated by Hosni Mubarak's regime to the point that members can run in elections, though only as independents. In a statement, the group said police detained Guidance Council member Abdel-Moneim Abu al-Fotouh, who is also the secretary general of the Cairo-based Union of Arab Doctors. Also held were Gamal Abdel-Salam, who heads the Union's emergency relief committee, Fathi Lasheen, a retired judge, and Abdel-Rahman al-Gamal, described by the group as an educator. Egypt's Interior Ministry could not be reached for comment on the detentions. Abdel-Salam was detained in December for close to two months after the government accused him and two others of 'forming a jihad group' linked to Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, charges the group dismissed as motivated by tensions between the Egyptian government and Hamas. A lawyer for the Brotherhood said prosecutors had not yet charged the men, but said he believed the detentions were connected to an ongoing crackdown motivated by what the government says is an attempt by the group to revive its international wing - charges the Brotherhood denies. The Brotherhood has historical ties to Hamas, as most of Hamas' founders were members of the Brotherhood's Gaza branch. But the two groups differ in the methods they employ to work for their goals, with the Brotherhood rejecting the use of violence. Also on Sunday, a Cairo court ordered the release of 13 senior members of the group in a related case in which state prosecutors accused the men of laundering money gained through terrorism. One of the men charged in the case had been Osama Nasr al-Din, a member of the Guidance Council. Brotherhood lawyer Abdel-Moneim Abdel-Maqsoud dismissed the allegations against them. 'The proof is that the court ordered the [13 Brotherhood members'] release today at the first hearing,' he said. The men have not yet been released. The group won roughly a fifth of seats in the lower house of Parliament in 2005, despite a heavy government crackdown on Brotherhood-supporting voters that culminated in Egyptian security forces firing tear gas at people who were waiting in line to vote. Authorities have since obstructed the Brotherhood's efforts to further its electoral gains in more recent votes for municipal councils or parliament's upper house." (Daily Star, 29 June 2009)

In February 2009, BBC World News reported that the Egyptian-German student Philip Rizk and the Egyptian blogger Diaeddin Gad had been detained as a consequence of their activities or criticism in connection with their support of the Gaza Strip. Philip Rizk was later released:

"Egyptian police have released a pro-Palestinian blogger who was detained last week during a rally. Egyptian-German student Philip Rizk was held on Friday, north of Cairo, where he helped organise a protest in support of the Gaza Strip. Eyewitnesses said he was bundled into a white van with no licence plates, which then sped off. Rizk says he was 'terrified' but not abused physically, according to a local human rights group. A security official confirmed the release and said an inquiry was ongoing into Mr Rizk's activities. Mr Rizk, who lived in Gaza for two years, writes the blog Tabula Gaza, and has just completed a short documentary about non-violent protest against Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip. 'I was repeatedly questioned about everything and I was terrified,' Mr Rizk said, according to a statement from The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information

(ANHRI) in Cairo. 'Although I was not abused physically, I was blind-folded all the time,' he added.

[...] Egyptian officers also threatened the graduate student from the American University in Cairo with long-term imprisonment. They asked if he supported Hamas, worked for Israel, or was a Christian evangelist, the group says. Early on Monday, plain clothed security officials searched the Rizk family home and threatened to detain his father, but were dissuaded by the presence of a human rights lawyer and an official from the German embassy, family members say.

[...] Meanwhile, a second Egyptian blogger remains in detention, security officials said; Diaeddin Gad, 22, was also detained on Friday after criticising Egyptian government policies, especially in relation to Israel's recent military offensive in Gaza. Many Arabs have criticised Egypt, which has the only border crossing with the Gaza Strip to bypass Israel, for not fully opening the frontier to aid and the wounded during the recent conflict in Gaza." (BBC World News, 11 February 2009)

Before the Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip in December 2008/January 2009, there were also reports on measures of the Egyptian government against suspected supporters of Palestinian activities:

Two months before the 2008/2009 war in Gaza, BBC World News reported on the detention of 32 members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt for joining protests aimed at breaking the Gaza Strip blockade by Israel and the cooperation of the Egyptian government:

„Egypt's outlawed Muslim Brotherhood movement says 32 members have been detained for joining protests aimed at breaking the Gaza Strip blockade. The group said 14 people were held in Port Said, 12 in Fayyoun and a number of others in Cairo and Beni Sueif. The Egyptian government co-operates with Israeli-led sanctions against the Gaza Strip, which is controlled by the Palestinian Islamist movement, Hamas. Many Egyptians, including the Muslim Brotherhood, disagree with the policy. The Brotherhood is Egypt's largest opposition group but is officially banned by the authorities. Earlier in October, Egyptian police blocked a convoy organised by opposition groups to carry medical supplies to the Gaza Strip. Reports said at least 15 people were detained in Cairo - some of them linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. Under an agreement brokered by the US in 2005, the Palestinian Authority, Israel and European Union monitors supervise the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt. Egypt has co-operated with this. Hamas, which has governed Gaza since June 2007, has been kept out of this arrangement. The Egyptian government has also co-operated in the Israeli blockade of Gaza, which Israel says aims to undermine support among Gaza Palestinians for the Islamist movement Hamas. The crossing at Rafah is closed almost all of the time." (BBC World News, 22 October 2008)

In January 2003, the Egyptian Al Ahram Weekly reports on two major Islamist trials in 2002. The majority of the 94 defendants in the first case were arrested in May 2001, originally charged with illegally raising funds to support the militant Palestinian group Hamas. Later 43

of them were acquitted and 51 people were sentenced by a military court to prison terms ranging between two and 15 years for belonging to a group called Al-Wa'ad:

"Islamists on trial: Two major Islamist trials took place in 2002. In one of them, 23 Egyptians and three Britons are being tried before a state security court on charges of attempting to revive the banned Hizbul Tahrir, or Liberation Party. All the defendants pleaded innocent and the trial has been described by lawyers as a way of 'convicting people just for their ideologies'. The arrests took place in April and the trial -- which is still going on -- began on 20 October. The suspects are also charged with establishing an outlawed group aiming to overthrow governments in various Islamic countries and revive an Islamic Caliphate. The three Britons involved did not deny that they belonged to the group in the United Kingdom, where it is not illegal; they insist, however, that they were not involved in any political activity in Egypt.

On 9 September, meanwhile, 51 people were sentenced by a military court to prison terms ranging between two and 15 years for belonging to a previously unknown group dubbed *Al-Wa'ad* [the Promise]. The convictions came after 94 people were arrested for allegedly belonging to the group, which officials said was plotting to assassinate top government officials, and sending members to Chechnya to receive military training in preparation for terrorist attacks planned in Egypt, including blowing up the downtown Cairo television building.

The majority of the defendants -- 43 of whom were acquitted -- were arrested in May 2001, originally charged with illegally raising funds to support the militant Palestinian group, Hamas, and Chechen separatists fighting against Russia. At the time, several opposition papers expressed their dismay, arguing that most political parties and many civil society organisations had also been raising funds to support the Palestinians ever since the Al-Aqsa Intifada erupted in September 2000. It was only later that the additional, more serious charges were added to the rap sheet." (Al-Ahram Weekly, 26 December 2002 - 1 January 2003)

In a report by Amnesty International (AI) published in April 2007, the same trial is described in more detail. The AI report mentions that the defendants were initially charged by the Supreme State Security Prosecution with illegally collecting money to send in support of the Palestinian intifada. Most of the defendants were held in different branches of the State Security Investigations for at least 70 days. AI also mentions allegations of torture and the fact that some of those acquitted were not released but continued to be detained under orders issued by the Interior Minister:

„Military court: Tanzim al-Wa'ad trial

The trial of 94 defendants accused of membership of Tanzim al-Wa'ad (Organization of the Promise), including seven who were not present in court, opened before the Supreme Military Court in the Heikstep Camp, north of Cairo, on 18 November 2001. Defence lawyers complained that the interrogation transcripts had been tampered with and that specific words and paragraphs had been erased by the authorities in order to hide evidence that the defendants were a group of people who had merely sought to provide

assistance to Palestinians and Chechens, and were not involved in financing "terrorist groups" as the charges alleged. One lawyer reported that he was threatened by a security officer responsible for the initial investigations, apparently because he questioned the findings of these investigations before the court.

Seventy-five of the 94 defendants had been arrested during dawn house raids in early May 2001, mainly in Cairo, Alexandria, al-Qalyubiyah, as-Suways and Giza. Most were held in different SSI branches for at least 70 days, during which they were reportedly tortured, including with electric shocks. They were presented before the Supreme State Security Prosecution in June-July 2001.

The detainees were not allowed to have their lawyers with them during the initial interrogation sessions before the Supreme State Security Prosecution. At least 24 of them told the Public Prosecutor that they had been tortured. Although some of them were referred to forensic doctors, the resultant examinations were not able, due to the passage of time, to establish what caused the marks on their bodies or when or how they had been sustained. The defendants were initially charged by the Supreme State Security Prosecution with illegally collecting money to send in support of the Palestinian intifada (uprising) and to Chechens fighting Russian forces in 2001. After the attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001, additional and more serious charges were brought, including seeking to topple the Egyptian government and to assassinate top government officials, premeditated sabotage and destruction, threatening peace and public security and possessing firearms, ammunition and explosives without license. On 12 October 2001, President Mubarak issued a decree referring the case to a military court.(80)

On 9 September 2002, the court sentenced 51 of the defendants to prison terms of between two and 15 years, and acquitted 43 others, including one of the seven men tried in his absence. Those sentenced included students, former government officials, a Yemeni national, three men from the Russian Republic of Dagestan, and three Egyptians with dual nationality. The sentences were ratified by the President on 17 October 2002, rendering them final. Some of the 43 who were acquitted were not released but continued to be detained under orders issued by the Interior Minister. Among them was Fawzi al-Said, then imam of Tawhid Mosque at Ramsis Square in Cairo. He was reportedly released in April 2005." (AI, 11 April 2007)

For background information on the situation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, please see:

- ICG - International Crisis Group: Egypt's Muslim Brothers: Confrontation Or Integration?, Middle East/North Africa Report N°76, 18 June 2008

http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle_east_north_africa/egypt_north_africa/76_egypts_muslim_brothers_confrontation_or_integration.pdf

(free Login required)

Background information: Connections of Palestinian activists (Hamas) to Syria and foreign relations between Egypt and Syria

In your query, two aspects were touched in relation to the above question on the situation of suspected supporters of Palestinian activities in Egypt: the connections of Palestinian groups to

Syria and the foreign relations between Egypt and Syria in the wake of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979. The following sources provide general background information on the connections of Hamas to Syria and two articles on the development of diplomatic relations between Egypt and Syria in the late 1980s:

The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and the New York Times (NYT) report that the leader of Hamas, Khaled Meshal, lives in Syrian exile:

"Since its victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, Hamas has failed to unify around a coherent program, exacerbating tensions within the Palestinian Authority. Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas prime minister and senior Hamas figure in Gaza, has appeared at odds with Khaled Meshal, Hamas's overall leader who lives in Syrian exile." (CFR, 27 August 2009)

"Mr. Meshal, one of the founders of Hamas, barely escaped assassination at the hands of Israeli agents in 1997 in Jordan. He was injected with a poison, but the agents were caught. King Hussein, furious that this was taking place in his country, obliged Israel to send an antidote. Mr. Meshal ultimately went to Damascus, the base for Hamas apart from its leaders inside Gaza." (NYT, 4 May 2009)

"Meshal is head of the Hamas politburo, a leadership body separate from Hamas' Palestinian Authority government, making him the group's top-ranking member. Exiled in Damascus since 2001, Meshal nevertheless exercises control over Hamas. 'It's Meshal that sets the strategy,' says Jess Sadick, a former counterterrorism analyst in the U.S. intelligence community. 'He's really calling the shots.'" (CFR, 13 July 2006)

The development of restoring full diplomatic relations between Egypt and Syria after a decade of division between the two countries following Egypt's signing of the 1979 Camp David peace treaty with Israel is covered by the Los Angeles Times in two articles from December 1988 and December 1989:

"A new round of shuttle diplomacy was reported Sunday in a growing campaign to reconcile Syria with Egypt, two key Arab states that have been bitterly divided for a decade about approaches to peace with Israel. Prime Minister Zaid Rifai of Jordan made an unannounced visit to Damascus on Sunday morning and conferred with Syrian President Hafez Assad, reportedly carrying a letter from Jordan's King Hussein to Assad connected with Syrian relations with Egypt, according to Jordanian officials. Syria has been an implacable foe of Egypt since the signing of the 1979 Camp David peace treaty with Israel. But a realignment of Middle East alliances now taking place may have cleared the way for an improvement in Cairo-Damascus ties, according to Western diplomats in the region." (Los Angeles Times, 5 December 1988)

"Egypt and Syria declared the restoration of full diplomatic relations Wednesday, ending a 12-year break that began over Cairo's peace initiative with Israel. [...] Syria, with its distressed economy, was left without alliance partners, dependent largely on its Soviet sponsors, who reportedly had tightened their military support over the past year. Furthermore, the Damascus government was increasingly isolated internationally for

providing sanctuary to Palestinian groups accused of terrorist activities. However, as the first hints of Egyptian-Syrian rapprochement were disclosed in recent weeks, the focus fell on the Palestinian question. Al Hayat, a London-based Lebanese daily, recently quoted unidentified American and Soviet diplomats as saying that renewed relations between Cairo and Damascus would permit direct Syrian involvement in a Washington-sponsored process to establish a dialogue between Israel and Palestinians over the future of the occupied territories. [...] Syria and Egypt were allies in arms in all the Arab-Israel wars through the 1973 conflict, but Damascus broke relations over the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's historic 1977 visit to Jerusalem, which led to the U.S.-sponsored Camp David peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. That treaty, signed in 1979, led 16 other Arab nations to break relations with Egypt." (Los Angeles Times, 28 December 1989)

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