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Nawapi Abdulsaid: Militant's Death Represents Another Nail in Abu Sayyaf's Coffin

Jacob Zenn

Executive Summary

- Nawapi "Khatan" Abdulsaid was an Abu Sayyaf militant infamous for his pro-Islamic State outlook and role in the militant group's piracy operations. While he was reportedly killed in battle in July 2017, the Philippine military has announced that this was a mistake. Abdulsaid allegedly survived until April 2024, when he met his end in a battle on Basilan Island in the southern Philippines.

In July 2017, the Philippine Armed Forces Western Mindanao Command (WESTMINCOM) announced that Nawapi Abdulsaid (alias Khatan) was killed in battle ([GMA News Online](#), July 7, 2017). So confident was WESTMINCOM in the operation that it even claimed to have identified and recovered Abdulsaid's body.

According to WESTMINCOM, Abdulsaid had been involved in an unsuccessful ambush on Philippine soldiers. Officials alleged that Abdulsaid was killed in the ensuing firefight and that weapons and drug paraphernalia had been recovered from the scene of his demise.

Nearly seven years later, Abdulsaid was declared to have been killed yet again. This time Philippine police reportedly located him in the municipality of Hadji Mohammad Ajul on Basilan Island and eliminated Abdulsaid in a gun battle in April ([KRDO](#), April 26). This demonstrated that the original reports of his death were incorrect. It is notable, however, that Abdulsaid became notorious only a short time before the ambush where he had allegedly been killed. This suggests that his first "death" had been intended to serve as a morale boost for the Philippine armed forces.

Abdulsaid was known for his role in an incident that occurred in November 2016, when six Vietnamese sailors were abducted and another was shot in the waters near Basilan Island ([Radio Free Asia](#), November 11, 2016). At that time, the main factions of Abu Sayyaf had recently pledged loyalty to Islamic State (IS), and the group was focusing both on planning its forthcoming

siege of Marawi and also conducting piracy operations throughout the waters near Basilan. By the end of 2016, Abu Sayyaf had made around \$7 million in ransom money, mostly coming from abductions at sea ([The Maritime Executive](#), October 28, 2016). Abdulsaid led the abduction of the Vietnamese sailors. Ultimately, of the six prisoners Abdulsaid was responsible for, two were freed by government forces, two were beheaded, and the remaining two were killed during Philippine rescue attempts ([Vn Express](#), December 10, 2017).

Abdulsaid is believed to have first cut his teeth in Basilan in 2007, when, under the command of Isnon Hapilon, he beheaded 10 Philippine marines in a notoriously brutal incident ([Goshen News](#), July 12, 2007). The beheading of the Vietnamese sailors in 2016 represented the peak of both Abu Sayyaf's power and Abdulsaid's personal brutality. Within a year, the group would conquer and then lose the city of Marawi, followed by a concerted effort that saw many key pro-IS Abu Sayyaf leaders killed. Likewise, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines began to deepen counter-piracy cooperation around the same time, all but ending Abu Sayyaf's once-considerable piracy operations ([Indo-Pacific Defense Forum](#), October 17, 2022; see [Terrorism Monitor](#), February 21).

Abdulsaid was important for Abu Sayyaf, both for his role in piracy operations and for being one of the militants spearheading the group's affiliation with IS ([Borneo Bulletin](#), April 27). However, little had been heard from the supposedly dead Abdulsaid in the years since 2017, amid the death of many of Abu Sayyaf's leaders, including his superiors (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), April 5). Assuming Abdulsaid's most recent "death" is accurate, his elimination represents yet another nail in the coffin of an extremely diminished Abu Sayyaf.

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Bao Youxiang: Warlord of Largest, Pro-Junta Ethnic Militia in Myanmar Continues to Run Wa State at 75

Khandakar Tahmid Rezwan and Scott N. Romaniuk

Executive Summary

- Bao Youxiang is the architect of the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the armed wing of the United Wa State Party (UWSP). Bao has led the group since 1995 and has successfully modernized both the local economy and the ethnic Wa militia—the largest of its kind, pro- or anti-regime.
- Bao's faction has enjoyed a ceasefire with the Burmese junta throughout both periods of its rule and relies today on Wa State's close connections with the neighboring People's Republic of China.

With most attention on Myanmar's armed factions focused on armed anti-junta ethnic groups, the few independent groups which have a comparatively peaceful and stable relationship with the regime are often forgotten ([Forces of Renewal for Southeast Asia](#), March 20). One of those groups is the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the armed wing of the United Wa State Party (UWSP) ([Grey Dynamics](#), March 14, 2024). The UWSA, a predominantly ethnic armed grouping of Wa people with roots in China and Chinese culture, governs the Wa State, officially recognized as the Wa Self-Administered Division by the Tatmadaw (Burmese military). The Wa Self-Administered Division operates as a de facto state within Myanmar ([Frontier Myanmar](#), May 15, 2019). Further, the UWSA has an entirely different set of

economic, political, and social structures from Myanmar, including a 30,000-strong army—the largest of any of the ethnic armies, and well-armed to boot ([The Irrawaddy](#), August 31, 2022). This is also believed to be a substantial number even compared to the junta's forces ([The Irrawaddy](#), August 26, 2023).

Bao Youxiang is the architect of the UWSA, a significant but overlooked non-state actor. He is also known by his Wa name, Tax Log Pang, and his Burmese name, Pau Yu Chang. At once both secretive and flamboyant, he is a de facto narco-king, warlord, and statesman all at the same time, and rarely receives any attention in the press ([Myanmar Institute](#), March 20, 2020). Indeed, his enigmatic persona and visionary leadership make him one of the most influential figures in the Golden Triangle region, which encompasses the border areas of present-day Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand.

Bao's Birth and Early Career

Born in 1949 in the Kunma Area of Shan State in present-day Myanmar, Bao loved playing with sharp weapons and self-made artisanal firearms. He started to show his skills when he formed the Kunma Guerilla Brigade to fend off Kuomintang factions that had relocated to his native areas after the Chinese Civil War ([Time](#), December 16, 2002). In the meantime, he also fought against the repressive Burmese government forces. However, he financed his team through drug trafficking based on opium cultivation. He later became a member of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in 1969, which was the formal start of his political career ([Myanmar Institute](#), March 20, 2020).

After that, Bao advanced from Battalion Commander to Brigade Commander of the 683 Brigade before joining the CPB Central Committee in 1985. Due to an internal power struggle with the Bamar- (ethnic Burmese) majority CPB and allegations that Wa and Kokang fighters were being used as cannon fodder against the junta

forces of the time, Bao rebelled and left the CPB alongside notable Kokang warlord Peng Jiasheng ([Nikkei Asia](#), March 29, 2022). The group of mutineers Bao led out of the CPB formed the core of the UWSP and UWSA.

Bao and the UWSA

The Wa rebels as a whole were originally led by Zhao Nyi Lai, who had founded the UWSP in 1989. Under Lai, Wa forces signed a peace treaty in 1989 with the junta which had at that point only recently seized control of the government. The Tatmadaw had taken power in response to then-Burma's mass pro-democracy uprising in 1988, which they violently suppressed ([UNHCR](#), May 21, 2023). Lai promoted Bao as Wa State's sole and ultimate leader before he resigned from his post in 1995 due to health issues. Since then, Chairman Bao has made Wa state more autonomous and the UWSA more powerful. He has achieved this in no small part by allying with China, which subsequently provided Wa state crucial civilian and military aid ([iNEWS](#), April 5, 2024).

Bao is a committed communist, due in no small part to his many years spent in service to the CPB's People's Liberation Army ([iNEWS](#), April 5, 2024). As such, he adheres to the Hegelian concept of dialectical materialism, suggesting that he views events as subject to continuous change and reappraisal rather than static. Bao has argued for significant autonomy for the Wa people, as well as the construction of a resilient Wa community that is capable of defending itself ([The Diplomat](#), May 28, 2019). It is in service to this goal that Bao has established the policies of conscripting at least one soldier from each family and mobilizing Wa women in the UWSA.

Bao has also modernized the UWSA into a competent and heavily armed defense group with armored personnel carriers, anti-tank guided missiles, and elite sniper troops ([Pulse](#), April 17, 2019). Despite espousing communist ideology, Bao is still

a strong proponent of democratic ideals. Marking the 30th anniversary of its 1989 ceasefire agreement with Myanmar's military junta, [1] Bao called on his followers to, "Hold high the banner of peace and democracy on the one hand and armed self-defense on the other" ([Frontier Myanmar](#), April 17, 2019). The Wa capital of Pangkham is an economically developed modern city and acts as a local tourist hub for the Chinese population in the neighboring provinces.

Conclusion

Bao believes the Wa people owe much of their continued success and autonomy to China ([Firstpost](#), November 20, 2023). China served as a significant ally for him, providing weapons and economic assistance to the UWSA and Wa State. Bao's legacy includes the removal of opium cultivation, which enables farmers to move into plain fertile lands to cultivate other crops; modernizing the UWSA; developing urban centers; and ensuring a long, if skeptical recognition from Myanmar's various juntas ([The Irrawaddy](#), January 15, 2024). Despite his retirement in 2005 due to health issues, he is still the de facto head of Wa State. At 75, Bao remains the architect of Wa's destiny ([The Malaysian Reserve](#), April 18, 2019).

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Notes:

[1] This is not meant to imply that the Tatmadaw ruled Burma/Myanmar

continuously through those years, given the decade of civilian rule from 2011 to 2021, nor that the junta in question was a static entity over a period of three decades. The Tatmadaw has been led by three different generals from 1989 to the present, each with their own policy outlook.

Satoshi Kirishima and Daniela Klette: German and Japanese Left-Wing Militants Found After Almost 50 Years

Herbert Maack

Executive Summary

- Recently, Satoshi Kirishima and Daniela Klette were located in their respective home countries of Japan and Germany. Both Kirishima and Klette were radical left-wing militants in the 1970s who managed to use clever tactics and false identities to evade identification and prosecution for almost 50 years.
- Satoshi Kirishima was a member of the East Asia Anti-Japan Armed Front (EAAJAF), which bombed a number of buildings in the mid-1970s, most famously the headquarters of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries in Tokyo. He was located due to a confession he made on his deathbed. Two of his former comrades now well into their 70s, Ayako Daidoji and Norio Sasaki, are still believed to be on the run.
- Daniela Klette, 65, was a member of the Red Army Faction in West Germany, which was responsible for 34 deaths before it officially dissolved itself in 1998. Her arrest in February 2024 prompted a manhunt for former associates Ernst-Volker Staub and Burkhard Garweg, who are 69 and 55, respectively.

On January 25, a Japanese man on his deathbed declared that he wanted to admit something. To a nurse, the man using the name Hiroshi Uchida confessed to being a wanted terrorist: "In the end, I want to die as 'Satoshi Kirishima.'" Japanese law enforcement officers subsequently rushed

to the hospital in Kanagawa Prefecture to hear Kirishima repeat his confession before he died of complications arising from stomach cancer four days later (*Asahi Shimbun*, [January 27](#), [January 29](#)).

Who was Satoshi Kirishima?

Kirishima had long been wanted on suspicion of planting and detonating a homemade bomb in a building in Tokyo's Ginza district in April 1975. He was placed on a nationwide wanted list the following month and his face was a common sight on police boxes' "wanted" posters for decades ([Japanese National Police](#), March 1). Kirishima was a member of the "sasori" (scorpion) cell of the "East Asia Anti-Japan Armed Front" (Higashi Ajia Hannichi Busō Sensen, EAAJAF), which was a far-left militant group tied to a series of bombings in the mid-1970s. The group claimed responsibility for 12 bombings, targeting major construction companies, research institutes, and a trading company. Their most famous attack was a twin bombing in August 1974 at Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. which killed eight employees and bystanders and injured 380 people ([Asahi Shimbun](#), January 27).

Kirishima was wanted specifically for his involvement in the bombing of the Economic Research Institute of Korea in Tokyo's Ginza district on April 19, 1975. Kirishima was also guilty of conducting six other bombings between February and April 1975, which resulted in serious injuries. Kirishima denied to the police that he was involved in the Ginza bombing, although he hinted at having taken part in other bombings ([Kyodo News](#), February 2). The Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department arrested eight communist militants connected to the series of bombings in the mid-1970s ([Kyodo News](#), August 30, 1999).

Kirishima eventually disappeared and finally on his deathbed stated that he remained alone and on the run without any assistance for years. It seems Kirishima was isolated while the rest of the group was

imprisoned or joined the “Japanese Red Army” (JRA). Two of Kirishima’s comrades, Ayako Daidoji and Norio Sasaki, were released as part of a deal demanded by the JRA after it hijacked a Japan Airlines plane in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 1977. Both of them, who are now 75 years old, continue to be on the run from Japanese law enforcement authorities ([Asahi Shimbun](#), January 29). Before his last breath, Kirishima acknowledged that he regretted his involvement in the bombings ([Asahi Shimbun](#), January 29).

The German Red Army Faction Arrest

The sensational re-emergence of Kirishima was followed a month later by the arrest of the wanted Red Army Faction (Rote Armee Fraktion, RAF) terrorist, Daniela Klette, in Germany. On February 26, police officers arrested the 65-year-old in Berlin, which ended her three-decade-long run from the law. The arrest was followed by a nationwide manhunt for her two comrades who are still at large, 69-year-old Ernst-Volker Staub and 55-year-old Burkhard Garweg. The trio is suspected to have financed their life underground through a string of armed robberies ([LKA Niedersachsen Press Conference](#), February 27).

Klette’s arrest resulted from a tip that the police received in November 2023. When police arrived at her door in the Berlin neighborhood of Kreuzberg, Klette surrendered without a fight. However, this was not before she sent a warning message to Burkhard Garweg to avoid capture. In her small rental apartment, authorities found two assault rifles, a pistol, a PG7 L-type rocket, hand grenades, ammunition, 40,000 euros (\$43,000), and 1.4 kg of gold (worth roughly \$110,000). In addition, police officers secured false Italian identity documents that she had used to pose as “Claudia Ivone” and “Claudia Bernadi” ([Tagesspiegel](#), February 27).

Klette, Staub, and Garweg belonged to the so-called “third generation” of the RAF, which was active from 1983 until the

group’s self-dissolution in 1998. Of the 34 victims killed by the RAF, 10 were killed by the third generation. Relatively few members of the third generation of the RAF have been caught, owing to extreme caution on the part of its members ([Welt](#), [July 6, 2012](#), [March 4, 2024](#)).

Klette, Staub, and Garweg are suspected of participating in three attacks from February 1990 to March 1993. One of these occurred on February 13, 1991, when Klette and other RAF militants carried out a gun attack on the U.S. Embassy in Bonn-Bad Godesber and fired at least 250 shots at the embassy building with automatic weapons. The attack did not lead to injuries, however. On March 27, 1993, RAF militants bombed the newly built Weiterstadt prison in Hesse, which was not in use at the time. Several guards present were captured by the group and released after the bombing. The detonation caused significant damage to the prison administration building and four cell buildings. Klette is also suspected of two attempted murders from the period following the RAF’s dissolution ([Generalbundesstaatsanwalt](#), March 7).

It is possible that Garweg has fled from Germany ([Tagesschau](#), March 8). The arrest of Klette and the ongoing manhunt for Staub and Garweg nevertheless led to other far-left sympathizers demonstrating on behalf of these RAF veterans in Berlin. Similarly, some have protested in front of the prison where Klette was held with slogans accusing the authorities themselves of “state terrorism” ([Welt](#), March 11; [Norddeutscher Rundfunk](#), March 18). It remains to be seen if the continued search for Staub and Garweg will re-energize the current German left-wing extremist milieu. However, the German Federal Police director Münch recently warned that left-wing extremists increasingly pose a threat in Germany ([Welt](#), March 18).

Conclusion

The fact that Kirishima and Klette were able to live decades under pseudonyms in highly

modern societies is a sign of how life in urban areas has become increasingly anonymous. For Kirishima, his evasion of the authorities is partly explained by the fact that he successfully avoided systems that would require him to register his identity—as a consequence, he lived without either a driver’s license or health insurance ([Japan Times](#), January 28). Klette, in contrast, posed as an Italian migrant in multicultural Berlin. With the arrest of Klette, in particular, German authorities have shown how relentless investigation and search measures can still bring to justice the last ghosts from the heydays of left-wing terrorism.

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Yahya Sinwar: Al-Aqsa Flood Mastermind Still on the Run from Israeli Forces

Daniele Garofalo

Executive Summary

- Yahya Sinwar is considered the mastermind of Hamas’s “al-Aqsa Flood” operation against Israel on October 7, 2023, alongside Mohammed al-Deif, who leads Hamas’s armed wing, the al-Qassam Brigades. Despite his decision to stay in Gaza and his placement at the top of Israel’s “most wanted” list, Sinwar has escaped being captured or killed by Israeli forces thus far.
- Sinwar is currently the highest-ranking Hamas official in Gaza, de facto ruler of the Gaza Strip, and the second most powerful member of Hamas after Ismail Haniyeh, the chairman of Hamas’s political bureau.
- In the past, Sinwar has displayed a pragmatic willingness to reconcile with al-Fatah, the Palestinian Authority, and Egypt, even briefly flirting with an indirect recognition of Israel. Since October 7, however, he has rejected anything short of a complete and comprehensive ceasefire.

Along with al-Qassam Brigades head Mohammed al-Deif, Yahya Sinwar masterminded Hamas’s “al-Aqsa Flood” operation against Israel on October 7, 2023. Sinwar has since become the Israel Defence Forces (IDF)’s main target in its military campaign in the southern Gazan city of Khan Younis. Even though more than six months have passed since the operation, Sinwar continues to manage and monitor the military situation on the ground and communicate with Hamas’s

leadership abroad. Sinwar has repeatedly provided his views on negotiations for a possible ceasefire. In fact, since the Israeli retaliatory offensive on the Gaza Strip commenced on October 28, 2023, Sinwar has insisted on the need for a major prisoner exchange before agreeing to any deal. As a key figure in Hamas and the al-Qassam Brigades, Sinwar has uniquely influenced Hamas's external relations (particularly with Egypt and Iran), its reconciliation process with al-Fatah, and its war with Israel.

Who is Sinwar?

Sinwar was born in the Khan Yunis refugee camp in the Gaza Strip on October 29, 1962. His parents were displaced from Ashkelon during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. After attending the Khan Yunis Secondary School for Boys, he enrolled at the Islamic University of Gaza in the early 1980s and majored in Arabic Studies. At that time, he also came under the influence of Islamism. In particular, he became affiliated with the Islamic Bloc, which was the student branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine ([Al Jazeera](#), December 10, 2023).

In 1982, Sinwar was first arrested at the age of 19 for participating in demonstrations organized by an Islamist organization, although no formal charges were pressed against him. In prison, he befriended Palestinian activists and decided to devote himself to the Palestinian cause. He was briefly arrested again in 1985. During this period, he developed strong relations with Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and participated in the creation of al-Majd, [1] a network of young Palestinian Islamists who investigated and attacked Palestinian informants recruited by Israel ([Al-Masry Al-Youm](#), December 8, 2023).

When Hamas was founded in 1987, al-Majd was included in its security forces. In 1988, Israeli security forces discovered that the network possessed weapons. This prompted Israel to arrest Sinwar once

again. After a few weeks, Sinwar was arrested again in 1989 and sentenced to four life sentences for the murder of Palestinians accused of collaborating with Israel ([Al-Hurra](#), February, 11). [2]

Turning Point

Sinwar's imprisonment in 1989 was a turning point for him. During his long sentence, he spent much of his free time studying Israel and its army, reading Israeli newspapers, and learning to speak Hebrew. During his detention, he also took over as head of the supreme leadership body governing Hamas prisoners in Israeli jails ([Al Jazeera](#), December 10, 2023). As a part of a large 2011 prisoner swap that released Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit (kidnapped by the al-Qassam Brigades in 2006), Sinwar finally gained freedom in 2011. After this, Sinwar became one of the leaders of the al-Qassam Brigades ([Al-Roya](#), November 27, 2023). [3]

In 2013, Sinwar was elected as a member of Hamas's Political Bureau in the Gaza Strip. In September 2015, he was listed as a specially designated global terrorist by the U.S. Department of State ([U.S. Department of State](#), September 8, 2015). In February 2017, Sinwar was secretly elected as the leader of Hamas in Gaza and a member of the organization's Politburo ([Shorouk News](#), November 21, 2023).

Right after his election, Sinwar established the Administrative Committee for the Governance and Control of the Gaza Strip. Sinwar's popularity steadily rose going into the flare-up between Israel and Hamas in 2021. As a result, in March 2021, Sinwar was re-elected for a second four-year term as head of Gaza's political bureau ([Al Jazeera](#), December 10, 2023). At a rally in 2022 to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of Hamas, he called on everyone to "be ready to rise like a flood for [the] Al-Aqsa [Mosque]" if Israel did not agree to the release of Palestinian prisoners. After Operation Al-Aqsa Flood on October 7, 2023, Sinwar accordingly became Israel's most-wanted man, along with al-Qassam

Brigades head Muhammad Al-Deif, as previously stated ([Sabq Newspaper](#), December 13, 2023).

Conclusion

Sinwar is currently the highest-ranking Hamas official in Gaza, de facto ruler of the Gaza Strip, and the second most powerful member of Hamas after Ismail Haniyeh, the chairman of Hamas's political bureau. Sinwar's time in prison allowed him to gain experience and respect, thereby enabling his rapid rise through the ranks. It likewise has offered him the social cache necessary to unite Hamas's factions through compromise. Shin Bet (Israeli intelligence) accounts describe Sinwar as a highly regarded, esteemed, and respected leader and a solid, educated, charismatic, and intelligent man who is not afraid of his enemy, going so far as to threaten Israeli officers who interrogated him. The same accounts also describe him as a very religious man, a writer, and an intellectual ([Al-Quds Al-Arabi](#), December 15, 2023).

After he was elected leader of Hamas in Gaza, he immediately took a very pragmatic approach to Palestinian politics. In 2017, Hamas itself entered into a reconciliation agreement with the Palestinian Authority, undertook rapprochement with al-Fatah, and improved relations with Egypt, which led to the easing of restrictions at the border crossing between Egypt and Gaza. Sinwar also improved relations between Hamas and Iran, moving past disagreements that had led to a breakdown in communications after 2015 to a point where Hamas was receiving large amounts of support from Iran. Finally, Sinwar was among the architects of a change in Hamas's conceptualization of borders, in which it recognized a Palestinian state limited to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. While the new party line attacked "Zionism," it appeared to suggest a begrudging, indirect recognition of Israel. After the invasion of Gaza, Sinwar, together with al-Deif, tightened the ranks of the resistance around the al-Qassam Brigades and

rejected any agreement or a temporary truce. Instead, both are demanding a complete and comprehensive ceasefire in Gaza ([Asharq News](#), December 26, 2023).

The popularity of Sinwar has grown enormously due to his choice not to leave the Gaza Strip. Sinwar continues to reject any kind of temporary arrangement, as he is convinced that the al-Qassam Brigades, as well as other factions of the Palestinian Joint Operations Room, [4] have already achieved significant military results. In Sinwar's view, Hamas has achieved more than Israel expected, and he believes they can continue fighting for several more months. Sinwar's importance is undisputable, which is why the IDF is investing a lot of manpower and resources to eliminate him from the equation.

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Notes:

[1] In Arabic, this means "glory" and is an acronym for Munazzamat al-Jihād wa al-Da'wah, "Organization for Jihad and Da'wah (Promotion of Islamic Ideals)".

[2] Sinwar was arrested by Israel on several occasions and spent a total of 24 years in prison.

[3] As stated, Sinwar's release came as part of the high-profile prisoner exchange with Gilad Shalit. Shalit, an IDF soldier, had been kidnapped by Hamas in 2006 while stationed at a border crossing. After several failed attempts to broker Shalit's freedom, Egypt and Germany reached an agreement for his release in October 2011. Sinwar's brother Mohammed, who had been assigned to guard Shalit, insisted that Sinwar be included in the exchange. On the same day that Shalit was released to Israel, Sinwar was among the first Palestinian prisoners to be returned to the Gaza Strip.

[4] For more on all the resistance factions active in Palestine and the Palestinian Joint Operations Room, see the “Armed Groups” section on the author’s website: <https://www.danielegarofalomonitoring.com/>