Martyrdom Operations in Palestine 1993–2005: Context, Major Operations



“Martyrdom operations” is the name Palestinian resistance factions gave to attacks in which the perpetrators blew themselves up with explosive belts or car bombs; the occupation and Western media call them “suicide attacks.” Palestine saw such operations from 1993; they peaked during the al-Aqsa Intifada between 2000 and 2004, and then declined. [1]

This article examines the phenomenon as it was: the context in which it arose, the crimes the factions presented it as answering, the most prominent operations, and the Palestinian, Arab and religious debate around it. Many of these operations were directed at civilian places such as buses, markets and restaurants, and civilians were killed in them – which made them among the most contested chapters of the

Intifada. [2][3]

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At a glance

Item	Details
First attempt	1986, an Islamic Jihad car bomb foiled before it was carried out
First successful operation	16 April 1993, a car bomb near the Mehola settlement in the Baysan valley
Before the al-Aqsa Intifada	30 attempts from 1993, 24 of them carried out
September 2000 – end of 2001	48 operations
By 1 April 2002	153 attempts: 102 carried out and 51 foiled
Main factions	The Qassam Brigades, the al-Quds Brigades and the al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades
Name	“Martyrdom” for the factions, “suicide” for the occupation and Western media

[1]

Origins: from Mehola to Afula

The Al Jazeera Encyclopedia says the first attempt came in 1986, when Islamic

Jihad's Saraya planned a car bomb that was foiled before it was carried out. It credits the first successful operation to **Yahya Ayyash**, the Qassam Brigades' engineer, on **16 April 1993**: a car bomb detonated between two military buses near the Mehola settlement in the Baysan valley, killing and wounding dozens of soldiers. [1][4]

Then came the **Ibrahimi Mosque massacre** in Hebron in February 1994, when a settler opened fire on worshippers at dawn prayer. The Qassam Brigades presented the **Afula** operation of 6 April 1994 as a response to the massacre; it struck the central bus station inside the Green Line, and 8 Israelis were killed. [4]

Between Oslo and the Intifada

On **5 January 1996** Israeli intelligence assassinated Yahya Ayyash by booby-trapping his mobile phone. The Qassam Brigades replied with a series of operations they called "Holy Revenge," planned and directed by **Hassan Salameh**, now serving 48 life sentences, in Jerusalem, Ashkelon and Tel Aviv; about 60 Israelis were killed and 210 wounded, among them soldiers. [4][5]

The peak in the al-Aqsa Intifada

With the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, in response to Ariel Sharon's storming of al-Aqsa Mosque, and the killing of demonstrators, assassinations and incursions that followed, the operations returned with unprecedented intensity. From September 2000 to the end of 2001, 48 were carried out; by 1 April 2002 there had been 153 attempts, 102 carried out and 51 foiled. [1]

Women entered this path for the first time in January 2002 with **Wafa Idris**, followed by Darin Abu Aisheh, Ayat al-Akhras and others. The most violent operations coincided with the occupation's invasion of West Bank cities in spring 2002, including Jenin and Nablus. [2]

The most prominent operations

The table sets out the most prominent operations as documented by Arab sources, with their dates, places, the groups that claimed them and their toll: [4][5][2][1][6][7]

Date	Place	Perpetrator / group	Toll	Stated context
16 April 1993	Near Mehola, Baysan valley	Saher Hamdallah al-Tamam	Soldiers killed and wounded	First successful operation
6 April 1994	Afula central bus station	Raed Zakarneh	8 killed	Response to the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre
13 April 1994	Hadera bus station	Ammar Amarneh	7 killed, dozens wounded	–
19 October 1994	Dizengoff Street, Tel Aviv	Saleh Nazzal	22 killed	–
22 January 1995	Beit Lid junction near Netanya	Anwar Sukkar and Salah Shaker	23 soldiers killed, about 40 wounded	Military target: a soldiers' stop
24 July 1995	Bus in Ramat Gan	Labib Saeed Azem	6 killed, 33 wounded	–
February–March 1996	Jerusalem, Ashkelon and Tel Aviv	Majdi Abu Warda, Ibrahim al-Sarahneh (disguised as an Israeli soldier), Raed al-Shaghnoubi	About 60 killed, 210 wounded	"Holy Revenge" for Ayyash's assassination
1 June 2001	Dolphinarium nightclub, Tel Aviv	Saeed al-Hotari	21 killed, 120+ wounded	–

Date	Place	Perpetrator / group	Toll	Stated context
27 January 2002	Jaffa Street shopping area, West Jerusalem	Wafa Idris	1 killed, 100+ wounded	First woman to carry out such an operation
27 March 2002	Park Hotel, Netanya	Abdel-Basset Odeh	29 killed, 100+ wounded	Eve of the Arab summit in Beirut
29 March 2002	Supermarket in Kiryat Yovel, West Jerusalem	Ayat al-Akhras	2 killed, 20+ wounded	Day the “Defensive Shield” invasion began
April 2002	Bus stop, West Jerusalem	Andaleeb Takatka	6 killed, 60+ wounded	Coincided with the invasion of Jenin and Nablus
5 June 2002	Bus at Megiddo junction	Hamza Samoudi	17 killed, 13 of them soldiers	Most of the dead were soldiers
18 June 2002	Bus from the Gilo settlement, Jerusalem	Muhammad al-Ghoul	19 killed, about 50 wounded	–
4 October 2003	Maxim restaurant, Haifa	Hanadi Jaradat	21 killed	After her brother and cousin were assassinated

The operations in detail

Below are the details of each operation in the table, as reported in Arab sources and human-rights reports, with the context in which it came and the occupation’s measures that followed.

Mehola, 16 April 1993

The first successful operation of its kind, planned by Yahya Ayyash and carried out by **Saher Tamam** with a car bomb near the Mehola settlement in the Baysan valley. Sources describe it differently: the Al Jazeera Encyclopedia's biography of Ayyash says it targeted a café in the settlement, killing two and wounding eight, while another of its entries says it was detonated between two military buses. [4][1]

Afula, 6 April 1994

About forty days after the **Ibrahimi Mosque massacre**, in which the settler Baruch Goldstein shot worshippers at dawn prayer, **Raed Zakarneh** of the Qassam Brigades set off a car bomb at Afula's central bus station inside the Green Line, killing 8 Israelis. The Qassam Brigades presented it as a response to the massacre. [4]

Hadera, 13 April 1994

A week after Afula, **Ammar Amarneh** of the Qassam Brigades blew himself up at a bus station in Hadera, killing 7 and wounding dozens. [4][5]

Dizengoff Street, 19 October 1994

A year after the Oslo accords were signed, **Saleh Nazzal** of the Qassam Brigades blew himself up on bus No. 5 on Dizengoff Street in central Tel Aviv, with a device prepared by Yahya Ayyash; 22 Israelis were killed and 50 wounded. It was the first operation of its kind in Tel Aviv. [4][8]

Beit Lid, 22 January 1995

Two Islamic Jihad bombers carried out a double bombing at Beit Lid junction near Netanya, at a stop where soldiers gathered; 23 soldiers were killed and about 40 wounded.

Ramat Gan, 24 July 1995

One of Yahya Ayyash's students in the Qassam Brigades blew himself up on a bus in Ramat Gan near Tel Aviv, killing 6 and wounding 33. [4]

"Holy Revenge," February–March 1996

After Israeli intelligence assassinated Yahya Ayyash on 5 January 1996 by booby-trapping his phone, the Qassam Brigades launched the "Holy Revenge" series, planned by **Hassan Salameh**, who moved from Gaza to the West Bank on the orders of the commander-in-chief Mohammed Deif. Al Jazeera Net lists four operations in it: [4][5]

- **Majdi Abu Warda** on a bus in Jerusalem: 24 killed, 13 of them soldiers, and more than 50 wounded.
- **Ibrahim al-Sarahneh** at a junction in Ashkelon about half an hour later: 3 soldiers killed and 30 wounded.
- **Raed al-Shaghnoubi** on a bus in Jerusalem: 19 killed and 10 wounded.
- **Ramez Obeid** of Islamic Jihad at the entrance to the Dizengoff Center shopping mall in Tel Aviv, on 4 March 1996: 13 killed and about 130 wounded.

Hassan Salameh was sentenced to 48 life terms. Al Jazeera Net quotes Rabin as saying, "What can I do against a person who wants to die?" and cites a survey in which 42% of Israelis said they wished to emigrate. [5][8]

The Dolphinarium, 1 June 2001

In the ninth month of the al-Aqsa Intifada, **Saeed Hassan Hussein al-Hotari**, 22, from the city of Qalqilya, blew himself up amid a crowd of young people outside the Dolphinarium nightclub on the Tel Aviv seafront. The Qassam Brigades claimed it with a will signed in their name, after Islamic Jihad had first claimed it. 21 Israelis were killed, most of them teenagers, and more than 120 wounded. [10][6][7]

Jaffa Street, 27 January 2002

Wafa Ali Idris, from al-Am'ari camp near Ramallah and a volunteer with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, was the first Palestinian woman to carry out such an operation, and it was the first martyrdom operation claimed by Fatah's al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades. The blast struck the Jaffa Street shopping area in West Jerusalem, killing an 81-year-old Israeli and wounding more than 100. [11][6]

Park Hotel, Netanya, 27 March 2002

Abdel-Basset Odeh, 25, from Tulkarm and a Hamas member, blew himself up in the dining hall of the Park Hotel in Netanya during a Passover dinner; 29 were killed and more than 100 wounded. Hamas said one of its aims was to thwart the diplomatic initiatives on the table at the Arab summit in Beirut. Two days later the occupation began its invasion of West Bank cities, which it called "Defensive Shield." [6][12][8]

Kiryat Yovel, 29 March 2002

On the day the invasion of the West Bank began, **Ayat al-Akhras**, 18, from Dheisheh camp near Bethlehem, blew herself up in a supermarket in the Kiryat Yovel neighbourhood of West Jerusalem, killing two and wounding more than 20. The al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades claimed the operation. [6][7]

Bus stop in West Jerusalem, 12 April 2002

While Jenin camp was under siege, **Andaleeb Takatka** of the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades blew herself up at a bus stop in West Jerusalem, killing 6 and wounding more than 60. [2]

Megiddo junction, 5 June 2002

An Islamic Jihad bomber detonated a car bomb next to a bus bound for Tiberias at Megiddo junction; 17 were killed, 13 of them soldiers, and about 38 wounded. Hours later about 30 Israeli tanks, backed by Apache helicopters, stormed the city

of Jenin. [7][13]

The Gilo bus, 18 June 2002

Muhammad al-Ghoul, 23, from al-Far'a camp in the northern West Bank, blew himself up on a bus travelling from the Gilo settlement to Jerusalem; 19 were killed and about 50 wounded. The Qassam Brigades claimed the operation; occupation forces arrested his brother Iyad, and Sharon vowed to retaliate. [14][6]

Maxim restaurant, 4 October 2003

On 12 June 2003 an Israeli undercover unit assassinated **Hanadi Jaradat**'s brother and cousin, both Islamic Jihad members, outside the family home in Jenin and before her eyes. Months later, having just graduated from law school in Jordan, she blew herself up in the Maxim restaurant in Haifa; 21 were killed according to the Al Jazeera Encyclopedia, among them 5 Palestinian citizens of the occupied interior, and about 50 wounded. The occupation responded by shelling and demolishing an empty house in Gaza and storming Jenin and Tulkarm camp, where it killed an al-Aqsa Brigades fighter and a nine-year-old child. [15][1]

Timeline

Date	Event
1986	First car-bomb attempt foiled before execution [1]
16 April 1993	First successful operation near Mehola [1]
February 1994	The Ibrahimi Mosque massacre in Hebron [4]
6 April 1994	The Afula operation in response to the massacre [4]
5 January 1996	Yahya Ayyash assassinated [4]
February–March 1996	The "Holy Revenge" operations [5]
September 2000	The al-Aqsa Intifada erupts [1]
January 2002	Wafa Idris becomes the first woman to carry out such an operation [2]

Date	Event
4 October 2003	The Maxim restaurant operation in Haifa [1]

Frequently asked questions about martyrdom operations

What were martyrdom operations?

Attacks in which the perpetrators blew themselves up with explosive belts or car bombs; the factions call them “martyrdom” and the occupation “suicide” operations. [1]

When did they begin?

The first attempt was in 1986 and the first successful operation on 16 April 1993 near the Mehola settlement. [1]

Why did the factions resort to them?

They presented them as a response to the occupation’s massacres and assassinations, such as the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre and the killing of Yahya Ayyash, and to the repression of the al-Aqsa Intifada. [4][5]

Who was the first woman to carry out such an operation?

Wafa Idris, in West Jerusalem in January 2002. [2]

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