Our Palestine — Article — 02 January 2024

Saleh Al-Arouri: Biography and Career



Saleh al-Arouri (1966–2024) was a Palestinian political and military leader from the village of Arura in the Ramallah district, deputy head of the political bureau of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), its leader in the West Bank and a founder of the Qassam Brigades there. He spent some 18 years in Israeli prisons and was deported from Palestine in 2010, until Israel assassinated him in a strike on Beirut's southern suburb on the evening of 2 January 2024, together with six of his comrades. [1] [2] [3]

This article is part of the series "Assassinated leaders of the Palestinian revolution," alongside the articles on Abu Jihad, Khaled Nazzal and Ismail Haniyeh.

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Who was Saleh al-Arouri?

Saleh al-Arouri was one of Hamas's most prominent leaders of the past two decades: he built the movement's military apparatus in the West Bank in the early 1990s, spent his youth in Israeli prisons, then became one of its political decision-makers abroad and a negotiator in prisoner exchanges [1] [2]. He was the first Hamas political leader Israel killed after 7 October 2023 [2].

Saleh al-Arouri at a glance

Item	Details
Name	Saleh Muhammad Suleiman al-Arouri [1]
Born	19 August 1966, Arura, Ramallah district [1]
Education	BA in Islamic Sharia, Hebron University [1]

Item	Details
Organisation	Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) since its founding in late 1987 [1]
Imprisonment	About 18 years in Israeli prisons (1992–2007, then 2007–2010) [1]
Exile	2010, to Syria; then Turkey (2012); then Lebanon [1] [2]
Roles	Hamas political bureau member (2010), deputy head (2017, re-elected 2021) and head of the movement in the West Bank [1]
Assassinated	2 January 2024, Israeli strike on Beirut’s southern suburb [1] [2] [4]
Buried	Martyrs’ Cemetery near Shatila camp, Beirut, 4 January 2024 [4]

Timeline

Date	Event
1966	Born in Arura [1]
1985–1992	Leads the Islamic student movement at Hebron University [1]
1990–1992	Repeated administrative detentions; builds Hamas’s military apparatus in the West Bank [1]
1992	Arrested and sentenced to 15 years for forming the first Qassam cells in the West Bank [1]
2007	Released, then re-arrested three months later [1]
2010	Released and deported to Syria; joins the Hamas political bureau [1]
2011	Member of the negotiating team for the “Loyalty of the Free” exchange [2]
February 2012	Leaves Syria for Turkey [1] [2]
2017	Elected deputy head of the political bureau [1]
2018	Washington offers $5 million for information on him [1]
2021	Re-elected deputy head of the political bureau [1]

Date	Event
31 October 2023	The occupation blows up his house in Arura [1]
2 January 2024	Assassinated in an Israeli strike on Beirut’s southern suburb [1] [2]
4 January 2024	Buried in the Martyrs’ Cemetery near Shatila camp [4]

Upbringing and education

Saleh Muhammad Suleiman al-Arouri was born on 19 August 1966 in Arura, northwest of Ramallah, completed his schooling in Palestine and earned a BA in Islamic Sharia from Hebron University [1]. He was active in Islamic work from an early age, led the Islamic student movement (the Islamic Bloc) at Hebron University from 1985 until his arrest in 1992, and joined Hamas after its founding in late 1987 [1].

Founding the Qassam Brigades in the West Bank

Between 1990 and 1992 the occupation held him in administrative detention for limited periods; during this time he began building a military apparatus for Hamas in the West Bank, contributing to the actual launch of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades in the West Bank in 1992 [1].

18 years in Israeli prisons

In 1992 the occupation arrested him again and he was sentenced to 15 years for forming the first Qassam cells in the West Bank [1]. He was released in 2007, but re-arrested only three months later and held for three more years, bringing his total time in captivity to some 18 years [1].

Deportation

In 2010 Israel’s Supreme Court ordered his release on condition that he be deported from Palestine; he was sent to Syria, where he lived for about three years

[1] [2]. After the Syrian revolution broke out he left for Turkey in February 2012, and later settled in Lebanon [1] [2].

In the political leadership

Al-Arouri joined Hamas's political bureau in 2010 [1]. He was a member of the negotiating team for the 2011 "Loyalty of the Free" (Shalit) exchange, which freed more than a thousand Palestinian prisoners [2].

On 5 October 2017 he was elected deputy head of the political bureau, with Ismail Haniyeh as its head, and was re-elected on 31 July 2021, also leading the movement in the West Bank [1]. He took part in prisoner-exchange negotiations after 7 October 2023, and told Al Jazeera in December 2023 that there would be no prisoner exchange before a ceasefire in Gaza [1].

Pursuit and the demolition of his home

In 2014 Israel accused him of planning the capture and killing of three settlers in the West Bank, an accusation it used among its pretexts for that year's assault on Gaza [1]. The United States listed him as an "international terrorist" in 2015 and in 2018 offered a reward of up to $5 million for information on him [1].

After 7 October 2023 the occupation stepped up its revenge on his family: on 25 October it arrested 20 people in Arura, including his brother and nine nephews, and on 31 October it blew up his house in the village [1].

The assassination of Saleh al-Arouri: Beirut, 2 January 2024

On the evening of Tuesday 2 January 2024, an Israeli drone struck a building housing a Hamas office in Beirut's southern suburb, killing Saleh al-Arouri [1] [2]. Six of his comrades were killed with him, among them the Qassam commanders Samir Fendi (Abu Amer) and Azzam al-Aqraa (Abu Ammar), as well as Ahmad

Hammoud, Mahmoud Shaheen, Muhammad al-Rayyes and Muhammad Bashasha [2] [3].

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told his ministers not to comment, while the Washington Post quoted a US defence official as saying Israel was behind the killing [1]. The assassination came amid the genocidal war on Gaza and the daily exchanges of fire on the Lebanese border since 8 October 2023 [3].

Funeral and burial

On 4 January 2024 thousands followed the coffins of al-Arouri and his comrades Azzam al-Aqraa and Muhammad al-Rayyes from the Imam Ali Mosque in Beirut's Tariq al-Jadida; a representative of Lebanon's mufti led the prayer, and they were buried in the Martyrs' Cemetery near Shatila camp amid Palestinian flags [4].

Reactions

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati called the killing "a new Israeli crime aimed at dragging Lebanon into a new phase of confrontation," and the Lebanese Foreign Ministry filed two "strongly worded" complaints with the United Nations [3]. Hezbollah said the crime "will not pass without response and punishment," the Grand Mufti condemned the assassination, and UNIFIL warned of the consequences of escalation [3].

Video

Conclusion

From Arura to Hebron University, from 18 years in Israeli prisons to exile in Syria, Turkey and Lebanon, Saleh al-Arouri remained a hunted man, until Israeli drones followed him to Beirut in a new chapter of the assassination policy pursued against Palestinian leaders for decades.

Also in this series: Abu Jihad, Khaled Nazzal, Ismail Haniyeh.

Frequently asked questions about Saleh al-Arouri

Who was Saleh al-Arouri?

A Palestinian leader from Arura near Ramallah, deputy head of Hamas’s political bureau and a founder of the Qassam Brigades in the West Bank.

When was Saleh al-Arouri assassinated?

On the evening of Tuesday 2 January 2024.

Where was Saleh al-Arouri assassinated?

In Beirut’s southern suburb, in an Israeli drone strike on a building housing a Hamas office.

How long did Saleh al-Arouri spend in Israeli prisons?

About 18 years: 15 years from 1992 to 2007, then three years from 2007 to 2010.

Who was killed with Saleh al-Arouri?

Six comrades, including the Qassam commanders Samir Fendi and Azzam al-Aqraa.

Where is Saleh al-Arouri buried?

In the Martyrs’ Cemetery near Shatila camp in Beirut.

What was Saleh al-Arouri’s role in the Shalit exchange?

He was a member of the negotiating team for the 2011 “Loyalty of the Free” exchange.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

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2. “Who Was Saleh al-Arouri, Assassinated by Israel in Beirut?” Enab Baladi, 3 January 2024.
3. “Condemnations in Lebanon of the Killing of al-Arouri and His Comrades,” Al Jazeera Net, 3 January 2024.
4. “Thousands Bury al-Arouri and His Two Comrades in the Martyrs’ Cemetery near Shatila Camp,” Arabi Post, 4 January 2024.