Kamal Adwan: Fatah Founder Assassinated in Beirut, 1973



Kamal Adwan (1935–1973) was a Palestinian leader from the village of Barbara, whose people Zionist militias expelled in 1948, and a founder of Fatah. He ran its information office, then became a member of its Central Committee and head of the Western Sector, which directed fedayeen work inside the occupied land. An Israeli commando unit led by Ehud Barak assassinated him at his Beirut home at dawn on 10 April 1973, together with his comrades Kamal Nasser and Abu Youssef al-Najjar. [1] [2]

This article is part of the series “Leaders of the Palestinian Revolution Who Were Assassinated,” alongside the articles on Kamal Nasser, Abu Youssef al-Najjar and

Khalil al-Wazir “Abu Jihad”, and the article on the Verdun operation.

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Who was Kamal Adwan?

Kamal Adwan belonged to the founding generation of the modern Palestinian revolution, a companion of Yasser Arafat and Khalil al-Wazir since their school days in Gaza [1]. His name is tied to developing fedayeen work inside the occupied land and building revolutionary media, which made him a direct target of Israel’s assassination machine [1] [2].

Kamal Adwan at a glance

Item	Details
Name	Kamal Adwan
Born	1935, the village of Barbara on Palestine’s southern coast [1] [2]
Refuge	Family driven to the Gaza Strip in 1948 [1] [2]

Item	Details
Education	Petroleum and mining engineering, Cairo University (from 1955) [1] [2]
Founding	A founder of Fatah [1] [2]
Posts	Head of information (1968); Fatah Central Committee member and head of the Western Sector (1971) [1] [2]
Family	His wife Maha al-Jayyousi, daughter Dana and son Rami [1] [2]
Assassinated	Dawn of 10 April 1973, his Beirut home, by a unit led by Ehud Barak [1] [2]

Timeline

Date	Event
1935	Born in Barbara [1] [2]
1948	Family driven to the Gaza Strip [1] [2]
1954	Leaves the Muslim Brotherhood and forms a 12-man fedayeen cell [1] [2]
1955	Enrols at Cairo University [1] [2]
1956	Takes part in resisting the occupation of Gaza [1]
1964	Member of the first Palestinian National Council [1] [2]
1965	Marries Maha al-Jayyousi [1]
1968	Heads the information office in Amman [1] [2]
1 January 1971	Elected to Fatah’s Central Committee and placed in charge of the Western Sector [1] [2]
10 April 1973	Assassinated in Beirut [1] [2]
March 1978	The “Kamal Adwan” operation led by Dalal al-Mughrabi [1]

From Barbara to Gaza

Kamal Adwan was born in 1935 in the village of Barbara on Palestine’s southern coast, between Gaza and Jaffa near Asqalan [1] [2]. After its people were expelled

in 1948 his family took refuge in the Gaza Strip, staying six months in Rafah before moving to Gaza City, where his father died in 1952 and his eldest brother, Muhammad Ali, became the family's provider [1] [2].

He studied at UNRWA schools and then at Imam al-Shafi'i secondary school in Gaza, where he met Yasser Arafat, Khalil al-Wazir and Riad al-Zaanoun [1] [2]. In 1955 he enrolled at Cairo University to study petroleum and mining engineering; Al Jazeera's encyclopedia says financial hardship kept him from finishing, while Arabi Post says he graduated as an engineer in 1963 [1] [2]. He then worked for Aramco in Dammam, Saudi Arabia [1] [2].

The first fedayeen cell

Adwan joined the Muslim Brotherhood in 1952 and left it in 1954, having become convinced of armed struggle, and formed a fedayeen cell of 12 young men [1] [2]. In 1956 he took part in resisting the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip during the Tripartite Aggression [1].

Founding Fatah

After the Tripartite Aggression the idea of an independent Palestinian national framework took shape, and Kamal Adwan was among the founders of Fatah in Saudi Arabia; he then led its organisation in Qatar for about a year, where he met Mahmoud Abbas and Abu Youssef al-Najjar [1] [2]. He was a member of the first Palestinian National Council in 1964 [1] [2]. In 1965 he married Maha al-Jayyousi; their daughter Dana was born in 1968 and their son Rami in 1970 [1].

Information and the Western Sector

In 1968 he moved to Amman, and Fatah's leadership chose him to head its information office, where he founded a periodical [1] [2]. After the events of September 1970 he moved to Damascus and then Beirut, and helped found the Palestinian news agency WAFA [2] [1].

At Fatah's third congress, on 1 January 1971, he was elected to the Central Committee and put in charge of the "Western Sector," responsible for work inside the occupied land, while keeping the information office [1] [2]. Under him fedayeen operations against occupation forces and settlements expanded, and he built a network of cells reporting directly to him [1].

The assassination of Kamal Adwan in Beirut

On the night of 9 April 1973 the Israeli navy landed commando teams on rubber boats on the Beirut shore. Some of them disguised in women's clothing, they attacked the homes of Fatah leaders in the heart of the Lebanese capital at dawn on 10 April under the command of Ehud Barak [1] [2]. They stormed Kamal Adwan's home, where his wife and two children were, and, according to his wife's account, shot him 58 times [2].

The same night the Israeli commandos killed Kamal Nasser and Abu Youssef al-Najjar; some 30 Palestinians from Fatah and the Popular Front, whose headquarters was also bombed, were killed in the operation [1]. Lebanese Prime Minister Saeb Salam resigned after the operation, which Israeli media called "Spring of Youth" [1].

Legacy

In March 1978 the fedayeen operation led by Dalal al-Mughrabi was named "Operation Martyr Kamal Adwan" in his memory [1]. His name is also carried by the Martyr Kamal Adwan Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip, which occupation forces besieged with tanks and snipers and bombarded during the genocidal war on Gaza [2].

Images and video

Frequently asked questions about Kamal Adwan

Who was Kamal Adwan?

A Palestinian leader from the village of Barbara, a founder of Fatah, member of its Central Committee and head of the Western Sector.

Where was Kamal Adwan from?

From the village of Barbara on Palestine’s southern coast, whose people were expelled in 1948.

What was the Western Sector?

A Fatah apparatus responsible for fedayeen work inside the occupied land, which Adwan headed from 1971.

When was Kamal Adwan assassinated?

At dawn on 10 April 1973 at his home in Beirut.

Who killed Kamal Adwan?

An Israeli commando unit led by Ehud Barak, in the operation that also killed Kamal Nasser and Abu Youssef al-Najjar.

How many bullets hit Kamal Adwan?

Fifty-eight, according to his wife, Maha al-Jayyousi.

What bears Kamal Adwan’s name today?

The Martyr Kamal Adwan Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip, and the fedayeen operation led by Dalal al-Mughrabi in 1978.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. “The Martyr Kamal Adwan: The Fedayee Who Brought Explosives into Palestinian Resistance,” Al Jazeera Encyclopedia, 8 March 2024.
2. “A Founder of Fatah: Who Was Kamal Adwan, Killed by Ehud Barak in Beirut with 58 Bullets?” Arabi Post, 6 December 2023.