

Former Hamas chief 'behind pro-Palestine Armistice Day protests'

A former Hamas chief is behind one of the groups organising the [pro-Palestine Armistice Day protests](#), The [Telegraph can disclose](#).

Muhammad Kathem Sawalha led the proscribed terrorist group in the West Bank in the late 1980s and is alleged to have "masterminded" its military strategy with involvement as recently as 2019, before moving to Britain where he lives in a London council house. He is a founder of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), one of six groups behind the under-fire march in London on [November 11](#), and Israeli authorities claim his son, Obada Sawalha, is now its vice-president.

Another of the Muslim Association of Britain's three directors, Dr Anas Altikriti, co-founded a group called the British Muslim Initiative with a senior commander in Hamas,

Meanwhile, Zaher Birawi, a leader of the Palestinian Forum in Britain – another group organising the Armistice Day march – was described in Parliament in October by Labour MP Christian Wakeford as having been "designated by Israel in 2013 as a senior Hamas operative in Europe", currently living in Barnet, north London, not far from Sawalhi, posing what the MP described as "a serious national security risk".

An optician who lives in Leicester, Ismael Patel founded and chairs the Friends of al-Aqsa, another of the six groups organising the march.

Friends of Al-Aqsa (FOA) is an anti-Israeli NGO established in Britain in 1997 and Israel's state-linked Meir Amit

Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center says he is “actively involved in projects carried out as part of the delegitimisation campaign against Israel”.



Clockwise from top left, Muhammad Kathem Sawalha, Dr Anas Altikriti, Zaher Birawi and Ismael Patel

The revelation comes as The Telegraph has discovered that half of the groups organising the march – who are still defying calls from the Metropolitan Police to call it off – have links to Hamas. It has fuelled further pressure for it to be cancelled, with the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group (APPG) on anti-Semitism saying that it “proves that

these marches are not about peace” and the Campaign Against Anti-Semitism describing this newspaper’s findings as “extremely serious”.

Responding to The Telegraph’s findings, Andrew Percy, APPG on anti-Semitism, said: “The involvement of these people proves that these marches are not about peace, they are about stirring up Jew-hate and a hatred of Western values.

“They are organised to celebrate the murder of innocent civilians in the most grotesque ways, including ripping out babies from pregnant mothers, cutting off limbs of children and worse still. These people have no interest in peace and it is time the UK stopped indulging their hateful ideology.” Calling on the police to step in and ban the march, Mr Percy added: “The Met need to prove that they are here to defend the values of the majority in this country – not pander to a perverted ideology – by banning this hate march.”

The Muslim Association of Britain, the Palestinian Forum in Britain and the Friends of al-Aqsa have been contacted for comment.

There has been pressure on the Metropolitan Police to ban Saturday’s march. I’m sure the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister have, or had, some power to stop or ban activities on the streets that were not conducive to public order. So far the [police have asked the organisers to please don’t march](#), ever so nicely, pretty please. We know they have powers to ban a march if they want. Suella Braverman, the [Home Secretary directly referred](#) to use of such powers on a previous occasion. That was the [EDL march through Tower Hamlets](#) scheduled for 3rd September 2011.