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America must protect a hero
By Lawrence J. Haas

A week from today, a federal judge in San Diego has an opportunity to right a grievous wrong – to reverse last year’s decision by the Department of Homeland Security to deny political asylum to a young Palestinian man who, over the course of a decade, prevented the deaths of potentially thousands of innocent people in Israel and the territories.

His name is Mosab Hassan Yousef and his life story, as recounted in his autobiographical *Son of Hamas*, reads like the best in historical fiction – though his extraordinary tale is true, confirmed by Israeli intelligence.

Born in 1978, he is the oldest son of Sheikh Hassan Yousef, who he describes as a beloved figure among Palestinians and who, he reveals, was one of seven founders in 1986 of the terrorist organization Hamas, which now runs Gaza. It is his connection to his renowned father that made his exploits both possible and, at the same time, so improbable.

First arrested in 1996 after Israeli security forces discovered that he had bought guns and was threatening to take revenge for some Palestinian deaths, he endured a few months of physical abuse, awful accommodations, little food, and... well... torture in Israeli custody, and then spent additional months under better conditions at different locations within Israel’s detention system.

Contacted to serve as an Israeli spy by Israel’s intelligence service, Shin Bet, after his release in 1997, he first said yes with the intent to serve as a double agent, killing Israelis in the process.

He changed his mind, however, choosing instead to work with the Israelis rather than double-cross them.

Along the way, he privately renounced the Islamic militancy of Hamas and some of his friends, and then privately renounced Islam itself as he began to study Christianity in the late 1990s before being baptized in 2005.

He also came to despise the Palestinian leadership – PLO and then Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat and the competing leaders of Hamas – virtually all of whom he dismisses as corrupt and manipulative, eager to exploit their people rather than lead them, to launch uprisings against Israel on the basis of invented grievances no matter how much Palestinian blood would be spilled when Israel was forced to retaliate, to literally march their people into harm’s way before scurrying to the safety of the sidelines as the confrontation was about to begin.

The more time he spent with the Israelis, the more he came to see them as people, rather than the hated stereotypes of radical Islamic lore or the devilish figures about whom Palestinian children are indoctrinated.

Yousef was almost perfectly positioned for the role of an Israeli spy. As his father's son, he was above suspicion among the Palestinian people and, for the same reason, trusted in the inner sanctums of Palestinian terror.

Code-named the "Green Prince" by Shin Bet – green for the flag of Hamas, prince because his father was a king within Hamas – he sometimes accompanied his father to weekly meetings with Arafat and Marwan Barghouti, a senior official within Fatah (the PLO's largest political faction).

He enjoyed direct contact with every Hamas leader in the West Bank, Gaza and Syria of a kind that was matched only by the access enjoyed by Khalid Meshaal, the head of Hamas in Damascus. Meshaal himself used to call Yousef at least once a week and also used to leave meetings to take calls from him.

Smart, clever, creative, cunning, energetic, and apparently fearless, Yousef used his status to great effect, tipping off Shin Bet about plots underway – including one to kill Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and some Israeli lawmakers – as well as the whereabouts of some of the most wanted Palestinian terrorists.

He also pieced together the backgrounds of what was at the time a new organization that was befuddling Israeli intelligence – the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades – showing they were Arafat's own guards.

Tired of the spy game, facing increasing dangers of exposure, he convinced a reluctant Israel to let him settle in the United States in 2007.

When he later applied for political asylum, however, U.S. homeland security officials turned him down, pointing to his close ties to Hamas to conclude that he had "engaged in terrorist activity" – never mind that he needed his direct ties with terrorist leaders to prevent violence, not to facilitate it.

If that initial decision stands, U.S. government officials would deport Yousef presumably to the West Bank, where he would face certain death at the hands of Hamas and others who consider him a traitor.

It would be hard to imagine a greater injustice.