

PALESTINIAN ISLAMIC JIHAD

Background Paper

Information & Media Department

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BACKGROUND

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (hereon: PIJ) is a radical Sunni terrorist organization that receives financial and military support from Iran. The organization grew out of a radical faction of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. It was formally established in Gaza in 1981 by Fathi Shaqaqi, a Rafah-based physician, and Sheikh Abd al-Aziz Awda, an Islamic preacher, together with Ramadan Shalah and other former members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The founders were influenced, among other things, by the Iranian Revolution. The armed wing of the PIJ is the Al-Quds Brigades, also established in 1981.

The goal of the PIJ is to annihilate Israel and replace it with a state governed by *Sharia* (Islamic religious) law in all of the territory in pre-1948 Mandatory Palestine. The means to achieve this goal is armed struggle: the organization rejects the political process.

The PIJ has an annual budget of \$100 million. Iran is the main sponsor of the organization, transferring huge sums of money to the PIJ every year, along with advanced weapons and missiles such as the Fajr 5. Syria does not provide money or weapons to the PIJ, but allows it to operate out of headquarters in Damascus.

IDEOLOGY

PIJ's ideology is inspired by pan-Islamism, concepts drawn from both the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and Palestinian nationalism. It is ideologically opposed to the existence of the State of Israel, and believes that *jihad* will bring about its two central goals: the destruction of Israel, and the establishment of an Islamic Palestinian state in its place.

While the PIJ and Hamas have similar goals, there are differences. Unlike Hamas and Fatah, PIJ refuses to engage in negotiations or the diplomatic process. It does not seek political representation within the Palestinian Authority. Thus, whereas Hamas chose to participate in the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council elections, PIJ encouraged Palestinians to boycott the elections.

Like Hamas, PIJ conducts summer camps, mostly for high school students, placing emphasis on radical ideological indoctrination and paramilitary training. In an Islamic Jihad kindergarten, the children celebrate their graduation by dressing up in military uniforms, waving rifles, and declaring things like: "When I grow up, I'll fight the Zionist enemy. I want to blow myself up on Zionists and kill them on a bus in a suicide bombing".

TERROR ACTIVITIES

The PIJ operates in the Gaza Strip and in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). Operation Defensive Shield, which was carried out by the IDF in 2002, and the enactment of the Disengagement Plan in 2005, significantly reduced the organization's activity in Judea and Samaria (Westbank). As such, the organization now focuses its activities in Gaza.

The PIJ's means of attack have changed over the years. Their original method, suicide bombings, became less and less effective as Israeli security forces and technology became more efficient at preventing suicide bombings. Now, the organization launches high-trajectory rockets and mortar shells (some of which are assembled by the PIJ itself) from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory. The organization also carries out shootings, places explosive devices on the border fence between Gaza and Israel, and digs attack tunnels into Israeli territory.

The PIJ was also involved in three armed conflicts with Israel in the Gaza Strip: Operation Cast Lead in 2009; Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012; and Operation Protective Edge in 2014. Moreover, since 2018, there has been a significant uptick in terrorist attacks perpetrated by the PIJ, including the launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel, stabbing attacks, and drive-by shootings.

MAJOR TERRORIST ATTACKS CARRIED OUT BY PALESTINIAN ISLAMIC JIHAD:

Suicide bombing, 1989: on Tel Aviv-Jerusalem bus line 405, 16 killed.

Bicycle bombing, 1994: at Netzarim Junction, 3 killed.

Bus attack, 1995: at Kfar Adom, 8 killed.

Suicide bombing, 1995: at Beit Lid, 22 killed.

Suicide bombing, 1996: on Dizengoff Street in central Tel Aviv, 13 killed.

Ambush, 2002: at Hebron, 12 killed.

Shooting, 2002: from a settlement near the northern border, 6 killed.

Shooting, 2002: in Yeshivat Otniel, in southern hills of Hebron, 4 killed.

Suicide bombing, 2003: at Maxim restaurant in Haifa, 21 killed.

Suicide bombing, 2007: at Eilat, 3 killed.

WHO HAS DESIGNATED PALESTINIAN ISLAMIC JIHAD A TERROR GROUP?

PIJ has been designated as a terror organization by EU, UK, the US, Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and Israel.

ONLINE RESOURCES

[Reut Institute source on PIJ](#)

[Council on Foreign Relations source on PIJ](#)

[US Department of Justice – Indictment of Eight PIJ Members, 2003](#)

[INSS 2019 article – on PIJ attempts to bring about war between Gaza & Israel](#)

[ITIC source on summer camps in Gaza](#)

[Ynet article on PIJ kindergarten in Gaza](#)

[MFA source on suicide and other bombing attacks in Israel since 1993](#)