

Term

Palestinian Islamic Jihad

5.12.2006

Definition

The term Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) refers to a radical, Islamic terrorist organization¹ affiliated with Iran that strives for the destruction of Israel and the establishment of an Islamic-Palestinian state in all of Mandatory Palestine.

Background

The PIJ (*Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami al-Filastini*) was established in 1981 by two Islamic Palestinian activists, Fathi 'Abd al- Aziz Shiqaqi² and Sheikh 'Abd al-Aziz Awda. The two had close ties with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood which, at that time, prioritised internal Islamic growth in Arab countries over armed struggle against Israel. However, they were soon influenced into adopting a more activist line by the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

After carrying out several attacks against Israel in the 1980's, the PIJ's leaders were expelled to Lebanon in 1988 where they strengthened their ties with Hizbullah and Iran. A year later, Shiqaqi established the PIJ headquarters in Damascus, where direct contacts with the Iranians were made for the first time. This formed the basis for the PIJ becoming a direct instrument of Iranian policy in the Arab Israeli conflict (see: The Resistance Network).³

The PIJ opposed the Oslo Accords and joined the Damascus based Alliance of Palestinian Forces.⁴ The PIJ refused to recognize the Palestinian Authority and did not participate in the 1996 PA elections.

During the Second Intifada, the PIJ and its military wing, the al Quds brigade, took credit for killing several dozen Israelis, mostly civilians in over 60 separate terror

¹ Both the European Union and the US State Department consider the PIJ a terrorist organization.

² In 1995, Shiqaqi was killed in Malta by unknown assailants and replaced by Ramadan Abdallah Shalah as head of the movement. While completing a PhD in Islamic Economics at the University of Durham, Shalah was responsible for handing the propaganda activities of the PIJ and also directed the World and Islam Studies Enterprise, a think-tank devoted to issues championed by the PIJ ([MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base](#))

³ Meir Litvak, [Tel Aviv Notes](#), 11/28/02.

⁴ Both PIJ and Hamas rejected the 1993 Oslo Accords as a betrayal of Palestinian and Islamic rights, and they launched attacks against Israeli targets in a "race" (Shiqaqi's own word) to halt the peace process. However, due to its small size, the PA was able to take strong measures against the Islamic Jihad closing al-Istiqlal, the Jihad newspaper in Gaza, as well as arresting some low-level activists (Litvak, [Tel Aviv Notes](#), 11/28/02).

attacks.⁵ The group's resurgence had much to do with the financial assistance the group received from Iran⁶.

To date, the PIJ maintains its hard line position and refuses to uphold the most recent ceasefire between the PA and Israel (11/06). The group is funded and aided by Syria, Iran and Hizbullah.

In contrast to Hamas who ran for the Palestinian Legislative Council (01/06), the PIJ called on Palestinians to boycott January's elections and has so far refrained from taking an official role in the PA's politics.

Ideology

The PIJ denies Israel's right to exist and believes that jihad in Palestine entails a commitment to the movement's two inter-related goals: the liberation of Palestine and a pan-Islamic revival.

The PIJ's ideology is a mix of Palestinian nationalist ideas and concepts taken from the Muslim Brotherhood as well as from the Iranian revolution. The PIJ present a religious alternative to the secular nationalism of the PLO.

As opposed to Hamas,⁷ the PIJ has marginalized the role of social activity in favor of militant activity.

End

⁵ Notorious among its attacks have been the attack on the Tel Aviv nightclub in June 2001, killing 21 teenagers, the bombing of a commuter bus at the Megiddo Junction in October 2002, which killed 18 and the suicide bomb attack in a Haifa café on 4 October 2003, in which 20 people were killed.

⁶ According to American officials, Tehran has paid out millions of dollars in cash bonuses for each attack perpetrated against Israel— see Douglas Frantz and James Risen, [New York Times](#), 03/24/02.

⁷ Hamas gave prominence to social welfare activity and proselytizing (dawa), even as it engaged in a simultaneous terror campaign.