

Islamic Jihad – Description

Palestinian Islamic Jihad (in Arabic Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami al-Filastin), known by Israelis simply as Islamic Jihad, was formed in 1979 by Islamic fundamentalist Fathi Shkaki and other radical Palestinian students who split from the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip, whom they considered too moderate.

Following the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat in 1981, Egypt expelled Islamic Jihad, which was thought to have collaborated with the Muslim Brotherhood in the killing, from its territory to the Gaza Strip. The group, which holds the stated goal of wanting to destroy the State of Israel and create an Islamic state in Palestine in its place, has been designated as a terrorist group by the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, Australia and Israel.

Islamic Jihad began focusing its terrorist activities against Israel in the 1980s. Before the First Intifada broke out in 1987, the group carried out several terrorist attacks against Israelis in the Gaza Strip. In August 1988, its leaders, Shkaki and Abd al-Aziz Odah, were expelled to Lebanon.

In Lebanon, Shkaki formed close contacts with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, which at the time was funding and arming Hezbollah, the Lebanese-based Shi'ite militant group. Shkaki set about reorganizing Islamic Jihad, as well as learning new terror tactics from Hezbollah.

In 1989, Islamic Jihad moved its headquarters to Damascus, Syria, where its headquarters has remained. It is believed that the group is funded by the regimes in Syria and Iran. Its main theater of operations is the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but the group has also operated in Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt.

In the Palestinian territories, Islamic Jihad formed an alliance with Hamas after the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords between Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction and Israel. Islamic Jihad and Hamas, which is much larger in numbers than Islamic Jihad, share one main ideological difference: Islamic Jihad believe that Islamic law should first be forced upon Arab and Muslim states, and then the rest of the world, including Israel. Hamas, which is also an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, has reversed those priorities, focusing first on eradicating Israel and creating a Palestinian caliphate in Palestine, and then launching violent jihad against moderate Arab and Muslim regimes. However, Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, has signed a ceasefire agreement with Israel while Islamic Jihad has stated it would not abide by the agreement, which includes the halt of rocket fire from Gaza into Israel. Both Hamas and Islamic Jihad view the

Palestinian Authority, led by Mahmoud Abbas, to be tainted by Western secularism, and consider it to be an illegitimate leader of the Palestinian people.

The two groups have joined forces on numerous occasions, one of the most notable being the bloody suicide bombing at the Beit Lid Junction in Israel in 1995, in which eight Israelis were killed and more than 50 others wounded. Israel has responded to Islamic Jihad terrorist activities mostly through a policy of targeted killings of its operators and leaders. In 1995, Shkaki was shot and killed in Malta by an unidentified passenger on a motorcycle. It is widely believed that Israel's Mossad espionage agency was behind his murder.

Since Shkaki's death, fellow founder Sheikh Abdullah Ramadan Shallah has led Islamic Jihad.

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