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Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ)

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aka PIJ; PIJ-Shaqaqi Faction; PIJ-Shallah Faction; Islamic Jihad of Palestine; Islamic Jihad in Palestine; Abu Ghunaym Squad of the Hizballah Bayt al-Maqdis; Al-Quds Squads; Al-Quds Brigades; Saraya al-Quds; Al-Awdah Brigades

Description: Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ) was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization on October 8, 1997. Formed by militant Palestinians in Gaza during the 1970s, PIJ is committed to the destruction of Israel through attacks against Israeli military and civilian targets and to the creation of an Islamic state in all of historic Palestine, including present day Israel.

Activities: PIJ terrorists have conducted numerous attacks, including large-scale suicide bombings, against Israeli civilian and military targets. Although U.S. citizens have died in PIJ attacks, the group has not directly targeted U.S. interests. Between 2008 and 2011, PIJ primarily conducted rocket attacks aimed at southern Israeli cities and attacked Israeli targets with explosive devices. In 2012 and 2014, PIJ operatives carried out attacks on Israeli buses in Tel Aviv. In March 2014, PIJ carried out a wave of rocket attacks into Israeli territory; 60 rockets are believed to have reached Israel.

In early 2015, PIJ began re-arming and replenishing its ranks. In March of that year, reports suggested that approximately 200 new recruits between the ages of 19 and 22 were undergoing various PIJ training programs lasting anywhere from 36 days to six months. That same month, PIJ revealed its militants were smuggling weapons, including rockets and mortars made inside Gaza, through tunnels in Gaza, in preparation for future attacks against Israel. In May, Israeli forces blamed PIJ for firing a rocket that landed in Gan Yazne, a region close to the Gaza border. The rocket was the first mid-range rocket fired at Israel since the August 2014 ceasefire. In August 2015, four militants, including one PIJ operative, were arrested in conjunction with what Israel's domestic security agency Shin Bet described as a PIJ plot to attack Jewish worshippers at Joseph's Tomb in the West Bank. Later that month, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) claimed PIJ operatives in Syria fired four rockets at the Golan Heights and Upper Galilee.

Over the course of 2016, PIJ continued to strike Israel, primarily through light arms fire at IDF patrols. In September, Israeli authorities arrested PIJ operative Mahmoud Yusuf Hasin Abu Taha upon his entry into Israel from Gaza, interrupting a PIJ plot to abduct and kill an IDF soldier, and carry out a mass-casualty attack on a reception hall in Beersheba. PIJ also boycotted the Palestinian municipal elections in October, arguing in favor of resistance, rather than elections, as a means to achieve Palestinian goals.

Strength: PIJ has close to 1,000 members.

Location/Area of Operation: Primarily Gaza, with minimal operational presence in the West Bank and Israel. Other leadership elements reside in Lebanon and official representatives are scattered throughout the Middle East.

Funding and External Aid: PIJ receives financial assistance and training primarily from Iran. PIJ has partnered with Iranian- and Syrian-sponsored Hizballah to carry out joint operations.

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