On September 28, 2018, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) spokesman Da’ud Shehab announced the **election of Ziyad al-Nakhalah as secretary general.** Al-Nakhalah, the organization’s third leader, replaced Ramadan Abdallah Shalah, who has been in a coma for the past six months (following a series of strokes). **The PIJ is Iran’s preferred proxy in the internal Palestinian arena.** Ziyad al-Nakhalah, who has strong connections with Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Qods Force, plays a central role in fostering and promoting the PIJ’s collaboration with Iran. Therefore it can be expected that under al-Nakhalah’s leadership **the PIJ will continue to promote Iran’s interests in the Gaza Strip and in the internal Palestinian arena in general;** and in return the PIJ will profit from generous Iranian financial and military support, which will help it preserve its status as the second most important terrorist organization in the Gaza Strip (after Hamas).

- Ziyad al-Nakhalah, who today lives in Lebanon, was *one of the founders of the Jerusalem Brigades, the PIJ’s military-terrorist wing. In the past he was sentenced to life imprisonment in Israel because of his involvement with terrorism (and released in the Jibril Deal). He was detained again and exiled by Israel to Lebanon (where he decided to remain). He has close relations with senior Iranians, among them Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Iranian Qods Force,* who plays a key role in transferring Iranian support to Hamas and the PIJ. **Al-Nakhalah also has strong ties to the Hezbollah leadership.** On January 23, 2014, the United States designed him a terrorist operative and his name was added to the American its list of terrorists (the PIJ was designated as a terrorist organization by the United States on October 8, 1997).
Ziyad al-Nakhalah (right) with Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC’s Qods Force at the tenth anniversary of the death of Imad Mughnieh (Mehr, February 15, 2018).

The PIJ is a radical Islamist Palestinian terrorist organization, second in size in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria. The organization is in favor of the violent destruction of the State of Israel. In a video recently produced for the anniversary of the killing of PIJ founder Fathi Shqaqi, al-Nakhalah said the PIJ was committed to Islam, the spirit of jihad and the “resistance” [i.e., the strategy for destroying Israel through violence and terrorism]. He said the PIJ would continue confronting Israel until it was victorious (Filastin al-Yawm, October 25, 2018). At the end of the video a drone is seen lifting a picture of al-Nakhalah, and in the background he can be heard saying, “[We will] never surrender to the United States and Israel. We will continue to resist until we destroy Israel” (Jerusalem Brigades website, October 25, 2018).

The Iranians’ generous support makes the PIJ and Iran interdependent, allowing the organization to maintain an extensive terrorist infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, making it second in importance only to Hamas. The PIJ’s infrastructure includes a rocket system (with medium-range rockets that can reach the center of Israel) and attack tunnels. It also has its own media network (a satellite channel operated from Beirut, a radio station and a...
news agency based in the Gaza Strip) and a social support system (which also deals with inculcating the organization’s radical Islamist ideology in the younger generation). At the end of Operation Pillar of Defense Ziyad al-Nakhalah praised Iran for its support of the Palestinian organizations, saying, "…the weapons the resistance fights with, even the weapons of Hamas, from the first bullet to the [last] rocket, and even what is manufactured locally [in the Gaza Strip] is, in effect, Iranian…” (al-Hayat, November 18, 2012).

During the second intifada the PIJ carried out suicide bombing attacks under the aegis of and with the support of Iran and Syria. For the past decade the PIJ’s involvement in fighting Israel from the Gaza Strip has been prominent. Generally speaking, the PIJ coordinates its activities with Hamas, which is the dominant force in the Gaza Strip. However, in some instances it acts independently and carries out attacks on its own initiative (in ITIC assessment with external direction), in defiance of Hamas. The rocket fire targeting the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip on October 26 and 27 was the first significant activity carried out by the PIJ since Ziyad al-Nakhalah was elected to head the organization.

The recent rocket attack, which was represented as retaliation for the killing of Gazans in the “return march,” and the unilateral ceasefire declared by the PIJ were not coordinated with Hamas. In ITIC assessment, the objective of the rocket fire was to send a message to Hamas and Egypt regarding the PIJ’s seniority and importance, and to show itself as an

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1 From the January 7, 2013 bulletin, “Iranian support for the Palestinian terrorist organizations. Iran supports the military buildup of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip and seeks to rebuild their military capabilities after Operation Pillar of Defense, especially their rocket-launching networks.”
important assets for Iran under the leadership of Ziyad al-Nakhalah (which will enable the PIJ to continue receiving generous financial and military aid from Iran).

Despite the PIJ’s efforts to represent the election of al-Nakhalah as the outcome of a well-ordered and free election, in ITIC assessment Iran and Jerusalem Brigades in the Gaza Strip operatives had critical influence on his nomination. Thus it can be expected that Ziyad al-Nakhalah will preserve the organization’s radical Islamist nature and its close ties with Iran (and with the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis as well). It can be assumed that Iran will continue to support the PIJ with funds, weapons and the transfer of technical know-how, as its preferred organization for promoting its interests in the Gaza Strip and in the Palestinian arena in general.

Portrait of Ziyad Rushdi al-Nakhalah

Biography

- **Ziyad al-Nakhalah (Abu Tareq)** was born in Gaza on April 6, 1953, and grew up in Khan Yunis. He is married and has six children (two sons and four daughters). He has a teaching certificate from the Gazan teachers’ seminar. In 1971 he was detained by Israel for the first time and sentenced to life imprisonment. After fourteen years he was released in the Jibril deal. He was then elected to the PIJ’s first Shura Council. Fathi Shqaqi, who headed the PIJ, gave him the mission of establishing a military wing.

-Ziyad al-Nakhalah (al-Arabiya TV, November 20, 2012)

- Al-Nakhalah was detained again in April 1988 for his part in igniting the first intifada and his participation in establishing the PIJ. He was exiled to Lebanon, where he rose in through the ranks of the organization. In addition to his involvement in military-terrorist activities he was appointed PIJ representative in Lebanon. Over the years he moved between Lebanon
and Syria. Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 he has permanently resided in Lebanon (al-Araby al-Jadeed, London, September 28, 2018). His presence in Lebanon has enabled him to maintain continual close relations with the Iranians and Hezbollah with no interference.

- After Fathi Shqaqi was killed (October 1995) Ziyad al-Nakhalah was elected by the Shura Council to the position of deputy secretary general. He became a member of the limited military headquarters headed by Ramadan Shalah (al-Istaqlal, September 28, 2018). During Operation Protective Edge al-Nakhalah’s house in the Gaza Strip was attacked, killing his sister-in-law and her son (Filastin al-Yawm, September 27, 2018). Ziyad al-Nakhalah played a key in the talks Egypt held with the Palestinians organizations, and in the talks for the ceasefires that ended Operation Pillar of Defense (2012) and Operation Protective Edge (2014).

- On January 23, 2014, the American State Department put Ziyad al-Nakhalah's name on its list of terrorist operatives after the PIJ claimed responsibility for a terrorist attack on a bus in a city near Tel Aviv. According to a statement from the State Department, Ziyad al-Nakhalah had claimed responsibility for rocket fire at Israel in 2008, 2009 and 2011. The statement also said that Ziyad al-Nakhalah had close relations with the government of Iran, the foremost state sponsor of terrorism. It also said Ziyad al-Nakhalah stressed the importance of cooperating with Hamas, another organization designated by the United States as a terrorist organization (website of the American State Department, January 23, 2014).

- Ziyad al-Nakhalah and his organization support the destruction of the State of Israel through terrorism. They oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state with the 1967 borders and support the "right of return." As to the "return marches" of the past seven months, al-Nakhalah said they had opened the door to "new methods of struggle against Israel" for the Palestinian people to express their objection to the "siege" on the Gaza Strip (al-Quds, May 5, 2018). In recent months, during the “return marches,” Ziyad al-Nakhalah represented the PIJ in all contacts with Egyptian intelligence for an arrangement with Israel and the internal Palestinian reconciliation. He gave his first speech as PIJ secretary general on December 22, 2013, there was an explosion on a bus in the central Israeli city of Bat Yam. A passenger who noticed a big black bag on a rear seat called it to the driver's attention. He called the police and ordered everyone off the bus. After the passengers moved away from the bus the device exploded. A policeman was slightly injured.
during the "return march" of October 5, 2018. It was broadcast live on a large screen to the participants of the "return march" in the "return camp" east of Gaza City.

Ziyad al-Nakhalah, newly-elected secretary general of the PIJ, giving his first speech during a "return march" (Paltoday, October 5, 2018).

**Relations with Iran and Hezbollah**

- For many years Ziyad al-Nakhalah has had close ties with Iran, especially with Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force (responsible for providing military and civilian support for Hamas and the PIJ). He also has close ties with the Hezbollah leadership. He often visits Iran to meet with senior Iranian officials. According to Hossein Sheikh al-Islam, advisor to the Iranian foreign minister, the election of al-Nakhalah will strengthen the trend of "resistance" [i.e., terrorism] in the "territories." Ihsan Ataya, the PIJ representative in Lebanon, said that after his election al-Nakhalah received congratulations from PIJ allies, among them Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas (al-Sharq al-Awsat and the PIJ website, September 29, 2018).

Ziyad al-Nakhalah at a memorial service for the mother of Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC’s Qods Force (al-Ayam TV, February 14, 2013).

On February 15, 2018, al-Nakhalah participated in a ceremony held in the Iranian interior ministry to mark ten years since the death of Imad Mughnieh (the senior military operative killed when his car blew up in Syria on February 12, 2008). The ceremony was attended by Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC’s Qods Force. Al-Nakhalah gave a speech in which he said Mughnieh had played a great role in arming the Palestinian "resistance" (i.e., the Palestinian terrorist organizations). He added that they had cooperated with him for many years, knew him well and loved him. He said that 25 years previously he and Mughnieh had trained Hezbollah’s first monitoring unit. He taught Hebrew to 15 Hezbollah operatives so they could listen to and analyze conversations between IDF soldiers (Paltoday, February 15, 2018; al-Hadath, September 28, 2018).
Ziyad al-Nakhalah with Qassem Soleimani during Imad Mughnieh's memorial ceremony (Mehr Agency, February 15, 2018).

Archive photo of Ziyad al-Nakhalah and Imad Mughnieh (al-Hadath, September 28, 2018)

- Al-Nakhalah often meets with senior Hezbollah figures in Lebanon. On October 9, 2018, he met with a delegation of Hezbollah leaders, among them Ibrahim Amin al-Sayid, chairman of the political council responsible for the Palestinian portfolio; Hassan Huballah and Abu Muhammad Hadraj. PIJ figures at the meeting were political bureau members Abd al-Aziz al-Minawi and Akram al-Ajouri, and Ihsan Ataya, who represents the PIJ in Lebanon (Paltoday, October 9, 2018). **Al-Nakhalah is often interviewed by the Hezbollah-affiliated media in Lebanon**, such as al-Mayadeen TV and al-Manar, as well as Iranian channels (al-Mayadeen YouTube channel, Lebanon, May 14, 2018).
Praising Iran for the military support it gives the Palestinian terrorist organizations

- Before Operation Cast Lead (November 2012) the Iranians and the Palestinian terrorist organizations they support did not make public the Iranian military aid. During the operation a change occurred in their policy and the PIJ launched a media campaign emphasizing the military support Iran gave the "resistance" organizations in the Gaza Strip. While Ziyad al-Nakhalah was PIJ deputy secretary general revealed Iranian support when he praised Iran for the "high-quality" weapons it sent the "resistance" (i.e., the terrorist organizations).

- The following are quotations from interviews held with Ziyad al-Nakhalah:

  - "We would like to thank the brothers in Iran for the great sacrifices they made to send us this weapon (by implication Fajr 5 rockets, which can reach Tel Aviv) to protect the Palestinian people..." (Ziyad al-Nakhalah interview with Paltoday, November 18, 2012).
Ziyad al-Nakhalah rejected rumors that the escalation was an implementation of an Iranian plan, saying, "...the weapons the 'resistance' fights with, even the weapons of Hamas, are Iranian, from the first bullet to the [last] rocket, and even what is manufactured locally is, in effect, Iranian..." (al-Hayat, November 18, 2012).

Interviewed by the Iranian al-Ayam channel in Arabic, in response to a question about the Fajr 5 rockets, al-Nakhalah said the rockets, which had "brought them victory," were received from Iran. Asked if they would stop smuggling weapons if a lull agreement was signed, he gave a vague, negative response saying the PIJ was an independent body that armed itself to be able to defend its people (al-Ayam, November 19, 2012).

Ziyad al-Nakhalah interviewed in Cairo during talks for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. He stressed that the "weapons of the resistance" in the Gaza Strip were manufactured in Iran (al-Manar, November 19, 2012).
Appendix

The election of Ziyad al-Nakhalah as PIJ leader

On September 28, 2018, PIJ spokesman Da’ud Shehab held a press conference in the "return camp" in eastern Gaza City, where he announced the election of Ziyad al-Nakhalah (Abu Tareq) to the position of PIJ secretary general, replacing Ramadan Abdallah Shalah. He also reported the names of nine senior operatives who had been elected to the organization’s political bureau. Shehab said other members of the political bureau had been chosen from "the other jihad arenas" in the West Bank, the 1948 territories [i.e., Israel] and the prisoners. Their names were not revealed for security reasons. Muhammad al-Hindi was elected deputy secretary general. He is considered the most senior PIJ figure in the Gaza Strip.

Shehab described the electoral process, saying elections had been simultaneously held in all the arenas on September 27 and 28. He added that the voting turnout was 99.3%. He said internal elections had begun a year previously, overseen and directed by the previous secretary general, Ramadan Shalah. Regulations and lists had been authorized, election committees had been formed (a central committee and sub-committees) both inside Palestine and abroad. The committees composed the voting body that would represent the organization's frameworks which chose the movement secretary general and the members of the political bureau (Paltoday, September 28, 2018). The organization will reportedly hold elections every four years.

The press conference where Da’ud Shehab announced the election of Ziyad al-Nakhalah (Paltoday, September 28, 2018).
Despite attempts to represent the elections as free, it can be assumed that the elections were not free but rather the results had been decided beforehand. In ITIC assessment it can also be assumed that the operatives of the PIJ’s military wing and Iran had a decisive influence on al-Nakhalah’s nomination. The Saudi Arabian newspaper al-Sharq al-Awsat reported that Iran would have preferred to have Ziyad al-Nakhalah declared secretary general without elections. The paper also reported that after the elections, observers are of the opinion that the influence of the factions supported by Iran is not dominant in organization’s leadership.

**PIJ military display during Ziyad al-Nakhalah's swearing in as secretary general**

- With the declaration of the election of Ziyad al-Nakhalah as the PIJ’s new secretary general and on the occasion of the 31st anniversary of the PIJ’s establishment, military wing operatives held a march and rally in Gaza City. During the rally Ziyad al-Nakhalah was sworn in in front of crowds of military wing operatives. The display was an opportunity for the organization’s military wing to show the weapons in its arsenal, including what they claimed was a new model rocket whose specifications were not revealed (Jerusalem Brigades, al-Mayadeen YouTube channel. October 5, 2018).

Ziyad al-Nakhalah is sworn as the new secretary general of the PIJ during a rally in Gaza City (Jerusalem Brigades website, October 5, 2018).
The weapons shown at the PIJ's march in Gaza City. Left: The "new model rocket" (al-Watania YouTube channel, October 4, 2018).

The PIJ reveals new rockets, which it claimed are being used by the organization (al-Watania YouTube channel, October 4, 2018).