



The Jenin Battalion: a non-aligned organization of terrorists operating against the Israeli security forces

Overview

► The Jenin Battalion is a network of armed terrorist operatives in the Jenin refugee camp. It is affiliated with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and serves as a quasi-branch of the Jerusalem Brigades, the PIJ's military-terrorist wing, in Samaria. It was apparently founded after Operation Guardian of the Walls in the Gaza Strip in May 2021. However, its existence was publicly announced in September 2021 when six security prisoners escaped from the Gilboa Prison. While the Battalion was founded by PIJ operatives, it includes operatives from other military wings, such as Hamas' Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades and Fatah's al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, thereby uniting coordination among the prominent terrorist organizations and overcoming the schism within Palestinian society. The operatives' allegiance is more local and less connected to the various organizations they represent, as reflected in their name and the names of the other local battalions. They use Telegram channels to communicate, sending messages and reports to each other and the public at large. Some operatives prefer to remain independent, operating on their own initiative while identifying themselves as belonging to the Battalion.

► In ITIC assessment there are several dozen Jenin Battalion operatives organized into cells. The Battalion has an operations room that coordinates its activities, but there seems to be no official hierarchy. Some operatives claim their weapons were purchased privately. The founding of the Battalion changed terrorist attacks against the Israeli security forces from spontaneous to organized. The Battalion operatives monitor the entrance of Israeli security forces into Jenin, plan a response and adhere to it.

► Various Battalion spokesmen stress the close ties between Jenin and the Gaza Strip, and warn that if Israel "crosses the line" in Jenin the response will come from Gaza. For example, in April 2022 the organizations in the Gaza Strip had the mediators convey a message to Israel that Gaza would enter the West Bank arena if IDF forces entered Jenin (al-Quds al-Arabi, April 10, 2022).

► Apparently the Jenin Battalion serves as a new model for networks of Palestinians terrorist operatives in Judea and Samaria wanting to attack Israeli security forces. Moreover, the PIJ's military-terrorist wing is interested in exporting the model to other cities in Judea and Samaria. The founding of the Nablus, Tulkarm and Bethlehem Battalions was recently announced, and in the future they may establish their own joint operations room.

Founding the Battalion, Its Structure and Available Weapons

► The Jenin Battalion is a network of armed terrorists from the Jenin refugee camp. It is affiliated with the Jerusalem Brigades, the PIJ's military-terrorist wing, an offshoot in Samaria. Its military and operational concepts come from the PIJ. **Khaled al-Batash, a senior PIJ figure in the Gaza Strip**, called the formation of the battalions in the West Bank "a genuine miracle and a great achievement" (Filastin al-Yawm, May 2022).

► A PIJ operative named **Jamil al-Amoudi** is thought to have established the Battalion in the Jenin refugee camp during Operation Guardian of the Walls by forming cells of operatives which became the core of the Battalion. According to reports, it began with a cell of four operatives which grew to eight, and later became the Battalion (al-Khanadeq, April 10, 2022).

► Jamil al-Amoudi was born in the Jenin refugee camp in 1966, and in his youth joined PIJ activity and became a senior operative in the PIJ's military-terrorist wing; he had been on Israel's list of wanted terrorists since May 2021. He was killed by the Israeli security forces in Jenin on June 10, 2021, a passenger in a vehicle with other operatives (Ramallah News, June 10, 2022). The PIJ issued a mourning notice glorifying his "heroic past" in the "resistance" [anti-Israeli terrorist attacks] (Jerusalem Brigades website, June 10, 2022).



Jamil al-Amoudi (Jerusalem Brigades website, June 10, 2022)

►The first public knowledge of the Jenin Battalion's existence came in **September 2021**, after the escape of six security prisoners from the Gilboa Prison. The Battalion issued its first public statement to the Palestinian media because of its the desire to break through the barrier of fear following Operation Guardian of the Walls, the weakness of the PA, which tried to pursue its opponents and the Israeli security force's intensive activity in the refugee camp, all of which made local resistance more extreme. According to Jenin refugee camp residents, the activities of the Israeli security forces and the suffering of almost every household in the refugee camp fueled their nationalist and "patriotic" sentiments, making the young men very responsive to the idea of becoming operatives in the Battalion's ranks.

Structure

►The Battalion is composed of terrorist operatives from the Jerusalem Brigades, the PIJ's military wing; the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, Fatah's military wing; and the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing. Sometimes their headbands, colored ribbons or badges on their uniforms, or other symbols indicate their organizational affiliation; however, their local identity is the common denominator.

►The operatives range in age from about 20 to 30, but some appear younger. According to an article that appeared in April 2022, the Battalion is composed of cells. The names of the cells indicate the existence of networks with smaller cells, such as Jenin al-Qassam, Jenin Battalion Tawalbeh, etc. There are also operatives who represent themselves as Battalion operatives but prefer to remain independent. As noted, the Battalion has no command hierarchy and every operative or cell can function independently (Matras, April 8, 2022).

►Mention was made of the night harassment units.¹ It is unknown whether they belong to the Battalion or operate independently.

►Despite statements from operatives that each can act as he thinks fit, a joint operations room was established and named "the wasps' nest." It is manned by representatives from the

¹ The night harassment units were established in August 2018 as an aspect of the violent return marches along the Gaza Strip border. Most of their operatives are young and their activities take place at night along the border security fence. Their objectives are to exhaust the IDF fighters in the fence posts and keep them on constant alert, and at the same time harass the Israelis living in the nearby communities. The units operated at several locations along the border and burned tires to create a smokescreen, sounded sirens near the fence, and later threw Molotov cocktails and IEDs at the IDF posts. The night harassment units operated for several months, and on March 9, 2019, their activity was temporarily suspended following a request for the Egyptians for a hiatus in which to exert pressure on Israel to implement the lull (al-Araby al-Jadeed, March 10, 2019). Palestinians in Judea and Samaria adopted the model for the first time during the demonstrations near the Eviatar outpost, and later it was copied in other confrontation locations.

PIJ, Hamas and Fatah, and its objective is reportedly to coordinate activities, share information and support "military operations," including logistic support and training. Occasionally the joint operations room issues official notices threatening Israel, instructing operatives, claiming responsibility, etc.

► According to a recent article, the joint operations room leadership has an open-door policy for anyone who wants to join and fight Israel, and it allows the use of all kinds of "resistance," especially "armed resistance" [terrorist attacks]. It coordinates shooting attacks, the throwing of IEDs and Molotov cocktails, obstructing IDF activity and fighting IDF soldiers (Shehab, May 24, 2022).

Weapons

► According to statements from Battalion operatives and official announcements, the operatives' weapons were acquired personally, and therefore, every operative and every cell decides how and when to operate. However, according to a report, the PIJ supplies the operatives' weapons (al-Araby al-Jadeed, April 30, 2022). According to al-Jazeera, each operative has a handgun and IEDs he manufactured himself (al-Jazeera, April 2022). Some pictures of Battalion operatives show them carrying weapons originating with the IDF.



Right: Military display of Jenin Battalion operatives (al-Khanadeq website, April 10, 2022). Left: Military display with one operative wearing a shroud with the inscription, "Suicide bomber unit" (Safa, March 3, 2022).



Jenin Battalion operatives and their weapons (Jenin Battalion Twitter account, March 3, 2022).



Jenin Battalion operatives at a memorial service for Da'ud al-Zubeidi,² brother of Zakaria Zubeidi (Western Asia Twitter account, June 25, 2022).

Communications

► Operatives transmit information by going into the streets and alleys of the refugee camp and using cell phones. In one instance use of a walkie-talkie was noted. The operatives communicate with each other via encrypted Telegram messages. According to one of the surveillance operatives, the Telegram channel is relatively secure and when a problem arises or it is necessary to report the advance of Israeli security forces, the Telegram channel is used. They also use it to transmit information about the presence of unfamiliar vehicles in the area and unknown people inside the camp (France24, April 13, 2022).

Exposure and activity on the social networks

► The Jenin Battalion spokesman is **Abu Maadh**. He issues announcements which he signs "the Battalion's 'the military information unit.' " Soon after the Battalion's founding, Telegram channels were opened through which its operatives communicate with their

² Died on May 15, 2022, two days after being wounded in an exchange of fire with Israeli security forces in Jenin.

various target audiences, other operatives and the general public (al-Jazeera, April 2022). Operatives and supporters opened many Facebook pages, Twitter and TikTok accounts, where they document military activity and post information about the Battalion and its operatives.

Types of Activities

► **Senior PIJ figure Ahmed al-Mudallal**, interviewed after an IDF activity in the Jenin refugee camp on May 4, 2022 which met with strong resistance, stated that the rules of engagement in the Jenin region had changed. He said the Jenin Battalion had instituted a new deterrent "equation," made it more difficult for the IDF to enter the refugee camp, demonstrated high combat capabilities for defending the Jenin region, and would not allow the IDF the same freedom of activity it had had in the past. He claimed it was the beginning of the phase of "victory over Israel" and would be copied in other cities in the West Bank. He said the Jenin Battalion was composed of "hundreds" of Palestinian fighters from various organizations who were constantly on alert and prepared to defend the city. The IDF forces operating in the area were under constant scrutiny and when information was received that they were moving towards Jenin, the Jenin Battalion fighters prepared to attack them. In the meantime, the fighters were occupied with attacks, such as shooting attacks and placing IEDs at IDF posts and roadblocks. When concerned there could be a large IDF operation, armed operatives were recruited from the nearby sectors to reinforce the Jenin Battalion operatives (Paltoday, May 24, 2022).

► **Maher al-Akhras, senior PIJ figure in northern Samaria**, said the Jenin Battalion confirmed that "resistance" and confrontation [with Israel] were the correct ways to conquer the "occupation" (Paltoday TV, June 29, 2022).



Maher al-Akhras interviewed by Paltoday TV (June 29, 2022).

The daily lives of the Battalion operatives are ordinary if nothing extraordinary happens, such as Israeli security forces entering the city during the day. At night the operatives, masked and armed, spread out through the streets and alleys of the refugee camp and at its entrances. They deploy according to alerts from the surveillance unit or from local residents who identify IDF activity. It is possible that they are divided into units, each responsible for defending a specific area.



Right: Jenin Battalion operatives in an alley in the Jenin refugee camp (March 27, 2022). Left: Jenin Battalion operatives deploying in the Jenin refugee camp to obstruct IDF activity (Paltoday, May 23, 2022).

► The operatives receive support from mosques and local residents. Calls from the mosque loudspeakers send the operatives into action and warn residents to be careful and allow the fighters to operate or stop the IDF from entering the city. They also warn the operatives of collaborators inside the camp and call on them to be watchful.

► During exchanges of gunfire, operatives generally conceal themselves. In an open area, they hide wherever they can. In an urban setting they hide behind buildings or walls. According to the al-Khanadeq website, the operatives created openings in the walls of houses, allowing them to pass from one location to another without being identified by Israeli aircraft (al-Khanadeq website, April 4, 2022).

► Their activities include:

- ◆ **Surveillance:** Surveillance is carried out to follow the activities of the Israeli security forces and to alert the Battalion when the IDF enters the refugee camp. The Battalion operatives position themselves at the entrances, some of them on high ground. Sometimes local residents also alert them to IDF activity and photograph the soldiers. Sometimes they use privately-installed security cameras in the streets. For example, after the shooting attack on Dizengoff Street in Tel Aviv on April 7, 2022, surveillance

was carried out at the entrances to the refugee camp around the clock and everyone who entered was examined (al-Quds al-Arabi, April 10, 2022).

◆ **Erecting roadblocks at the entrance to the refugee camp:** Battalion operatives often erect roadblocks at the entrance to the camp and on the roads leading to it to confront Israeli security forces and obstruct their progress. Israel's roadblocks are also targets for clashes with the security forces, especially the Jalameh roadblock. For example, after the shooting attack on Dizengoff Street, when the IDF threatened it would enter the refugee camp, and demanded the father of terrorist Raad Hazem surrender himself, operatives erected a number of roadblocks to keep the Israeli security forces out.

◆ **Adapting their activities to those of the Israeli security forces:** Battalion operatives also deploy according to the nature of the security force activity, such as detaining wanted Palestinians, counterterrorism, demolishing houses of terrorist operatives, etc. In April 2022, when the Israeli forces detained Palestinians, Battalion snipers positioned themselves on the roofs of houses overlooking the camp (Sasa Post, may 11, 2022).

Security instructions

▶ Jenin Battalion operatives often receive security instructions during a clash with the Israeli security forces, mainly through the Telegram channel. The operatives are instructed to appear masked or without identifying clothing, not to gather in large numbers lest they be attacked from the air, to remain hidden to avoid IDF snipers and not to enter civilian locations where they might be collaborators.

▶ On another occasion they were asked not to post their pictures to the social networks because it would make it easy for Israel to identify them, and not to use the social networks, cell phones or the Internet during fighting. Reportedly, the Israeli security forces identified an operative photographed during a military activity by the shoes he was wearing.

▶ The operatives are warned not to let media personnel photograph them during a military activity, and not to attend funerals lest they expose themselves and their weapons (al-Quds al-Arabi, April 10, 2022). For example, on June 10, 2022, a memorial service was held for **PIJ operative Jamil al-Amoudi**, the founder of the Jenin Battalion. Before the service the operations room forbade operatives planning to attend to carry cell phones and required them to be masked. They were also instructed not to fire their weapons into the air. The

media personnel covering the funeral were asked to distort voices when interviewing operatives and to photograph the participants from a distance (Paltoday, June 10, 2022).



Jenin Battalion operatives at a press conference (al-Araby al-Jadeed, March 4, 2022; al-Quds al-Yawm, February 14, 2022).



Jenin Battalion operatives at a memorial service for two operatives killed in clashes with IDF forces. In the front row at the right is an operative wearing the "shroud of a suicide bomber" (alresala.net, March 3, 2022).

Support for the Jenin Battalion

Public support

- ▶ The general public in the Jenin refugee camp supports the Battalion operatives and justifies their activities. The Palestinian public regards them as a local network of refugee camp residents and apparently identifies more with them than with their organizational affiliation. Many media releases have stressed that while their capabilities are limited and the balance of power is uneven, the Israeli security forces have no response for the Battalion. Local residents consider it a hothouse for "resistance fighters" [terrorist operatives], with sympathetic undertones of empowerment and glorification.
- ▶ However, other voices are also heard. In a recently-published article residents expressed their disgust for the situation caused by the activities of the Battalion and the Israeli security force reprisals (al-Quds al-Arabi, May 20, 2022).

Attitude towards the Palestinian Authority (PA)

► In November 2021 the PA security forces conducted a broad operation in the Jenin area, especially in the Jenin refugee camp, detaining wanted Palestinians and confiscating illegal weapons. The operation lasted for several weeks and its objective was to restore the PA's governance. It was strongly criticized and never completed.



Right: The Palestinian security forces deploy for a security operation in Jenin (alarabiya.net, November 21, 2021). Left: Violent clash between local residents and the Palestinian security forces (Safa, November 19, 2021).

► **PIJ operative Muhammad 'Alan** said that every Palestinian wanted by Israel was also wanted by the PA, and that included every Jenin Battalion operative. However, the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, Fatah's military wing, also has operatives in the Jenin Battalion, and they fight alongside PIJ and Hamas operatives. According to *al-Akhbar*, a new, young generation of armed al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades operatives has begun appearing in Jenin, Nablus and other PA districts (al-Akhbar, February 2022). However, they have declared they fight only against the IDF, not the PA security forces.

Copying the model

► Groups modeled on the Jenin Battalion have sprung up in Nablus, Tulkarm and Bethlehem. Palestinian sources said the Battalion had expanded by virtue of the dozens of operatives organized into cells, and that their objective is to exhaust the Israeli security forces by forcing them to operate simultaneously in more than one arena. On **May 19, 2022**, a Telegram channel affiliated with the "resistance" issued instructions for fighters who wanted to create a battalion similar to the Jenin Battalion, including an operations room, logistic groups, first aid groups, etc.



Nablus Battalion operative wearing a Nablus Battalion – Jerusalem Brigades vest (Ansarallah website, May 25, 2022).

► On **May 26, 2022**, the Jerusalem Brigades announced the formation of a new battalion in Nablus called the Nablus Battalion – Jerusalem Brigades. Before Nablus similar groups were formed in Tulkarm and Bethlehem (al-Jazeera, May 26, 2022). The PIJ's Nablus Battalion announced it had begun operating when it successfully, according to its claim, ambushed Israeli forces and settlers at the Tomb of Joseph. According to the announcement, IDF soldiers were wounded and the Palestinian operatives safely left the area. The Battalion announced the beginning of its "jihadi activity," claiming it would "continue to lie in wait for the occupation" (Jenin Battalion Telegram channel, May 25, 2022). That would indicate that the attack at the Tomb of Joseph was not spontaneous, but rather had been planned in advance by armed Palestinians whose objective was to shoot at Jewish worshippers who had come to pray.

► On the night of **June 29, 2022**, when a group of Jewish worshippers, secured by Israeli security forces, arrived at the Tomb of Joseph, they were attacked by massive gunfire, which wounded two civilians and an IDF commander. The soldiers returned fire and evacuated all the civilians from the site (IDF spokesman, June 30, 2022). The Nablus Battalion claimed responsibility for the attack (Nablus Battalion Telegram channel, June 30, 2022).



Claim of responsibility issued by the Nablus Battalion – Jerusalem Brigades for shots fired at IDF forces and Jewish visitors to the Tomb of Joseph in Nablus (Jerusalem Company website, June 30, 2022).

Jenin Battalion Involvement in Terrorist Activities

- ▶ On the night of **December 19, 2021**, the Israeli security forces operated in Silat al-Harithiya, mapping the houses of Palestinians suspected of carrying out a shooting attack. During the activity the forces were shot at and returned fire. Dozens of Palestinians gathered at the site and rioted, throwing rocks and IEDs at the soldiers (IDF spokesman, December 20, 2021). Following the IDF activity, the Jenin Battalion declared it had fought "a battle to defend Jenin" (Nabadh al-Saraya Telegram channel, December 19, 2022).
- ▶ On **May 5, 2022**, two terrorist operatives armed with an axe and a knife carried out a stabbing attack in Elad, killing three Israelis and wounding four, two of them critically. The terrorists fled and were later apprehended. After they were detained the Jenin Battalion announced its commitment to release them, stating they would be the first to be released (Filastin al-Yawm, May 8, 2022).



Jenin Battalion operatives claim responsibility for the terrorist attack at Elad (al-Hadath website, May 8, 2022).

► On **May 11, 2022**, during an Israeli security force activity in the Jenin refugee camp, Shireen Abu Akleh was killed. She was a reporter for al-Jazeera and held American citizenship. Ali Samoudi, also a Palestinian reporter, who was apparently standing next to her, was wounded in the exchange of fire. The Jenin Battalion announced that IDF forces had entered the Jenin refugee camp but had been exposed by Battalion operatives, who shot at and threw IEDs at them. The Jenin Battalion alleged that after the IDF forces had failed to accomplish their mission they "took revenge" on the Palestinian reporters, killing Shireen Abu Akleh and wounding another reporter (Jenin Battalion Telegram channel, May 11, 2022).

► On **June 20, 2022**, armed Jenin Battalion operatives reportedly held a broad military maneuver in the refugee camp. It took place during a memorial service for Battalion operative Baraa, who had been killed the previous week by the IDF (Filastin al-Yawm, June 20, 2022).

► On **June 28, 2022**, during an Israeli security forces activity in Jenin, shots were fired at the soldiers from an armed Palestinian riding a motorcycle. The forces returned fire, killing Mahmoud Marai, 23, from Jenin. The PIJ announced he had been a Jenin Battalion operative (PIJ Telegram channel, June 28, 2022).