

Egyptian Islamic Jihad

AT A GLANCE

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SUMMARY

Formed: 1979

Disbanded: 1998

First Attack: October 6, 1981: An EIJ member, Khaled al-Islambouli, opened fire on the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's box while he reviewed a military parade in Cairo, killing the president and 11 others. (12 killed, 28 wounded)¹

Last Attack: 1998: The EIJ unsuccessfully attempted to bomb the U.S. Embassy in Albania. (no casualties)²

OVERVIEW

The Egyptian Islamic Group (EIJ) was a militant Islamist organization founded in 1979 as a splinter of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is most famous for its 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and for its close ties to Al Qaeda. The group originated in Egypt, but following a crackdown by the Egyptian government, many of the group's members emigrated first to Afghanistan, then to Sudan, and eventually back to Afghanistan. Although initially the EIJ sought to overthrow the Egyptian government and establish an Islamic state in its stead, as the EIJ grew more intertwined with Al Qaeda, it reoriented to focus on global Jihad against the West. The EIJ's most famous leader was Aymenn al-Zawahiri, who became Osama bin Laden's second in command in Al Qaeda after the EIJ merged into Al Qaeda in 1998.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), often known as al-Jihad or the Jihad group, was a Jihadi, Salafi militant organization founded in Egypt in 1979 by Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Farraj.³ Farraj was originally a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, but split from the organization to form the EIJ following the Muslim Brotherhood's renunciation of violence in the late 1970s.⁴ However, the EIJ did not gain international notoriety until its successful assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat on October 6, 1981. EIJ, in cooperation with al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (GI/GAI),

assassinated Sadat in retribution for brokering a peace deal with Israel and his ties with the U.S., and further, hoped that if Sadat were killed, the Egyptian state would be crippled enough that the EIJ could seize control.⁵ After Sadat's assassination, a large number of EIJ and GI/GAI members were arrested and jailed.⁶ Farraj was among those arrested and was eventually executed.⁷ Among those arrested and jailed were many of the EIJ's future leaders, including Aymenn al-Zawahiri, Abbud al-Zumar, and Sayyed Imam al-Sharif. Although Zumar succeeded Farraj as the leader of the EIJ, Sharif and Zawahiri acquired a large following within the group while in jail. During this time, the supporters of Zawahiri and Sharif within the EIJ were sometimes referred to as the "Vanguards of Conquest" (Tala' al al-Fateh). Later, this title was occasionally used to refer to the EIJ as a whole.⁸

After serving three-year jail terms, Sharif and Zawahiri released from jail in the 1984 and, along with many other EIJ members, emigrated to Peshawar, Afghanistan in 1986, where they set up new headquarters for the EIJ.⁹ While in Afghanistan, EIJ members actively fought alongside Mujahedeen against the Soviet Union in the Soviet-Afghan War, which served to hone the group's fighting skills and develop its strategic planning capabilities.¹⁰ Furthermore, it was during this period that the EIJ first began to recruit Afghan Arab members.¹¹ At this time the EIJ is thought to have been at least operationally led by Sharif, although it also retained nominal ties to al-Zumar, who remained imprisoned in Egypt. Under Sharif's leadership, the group grew more extreme, and began emphasizing the concept of takfir, the belief that all those who are not Sunni Muslims are infidels.¹² It was during this time that Zawahiri, who was working as a field doctor outside of Peshawar, met a young but influential Mujahedeen leader named Osama bin Laden.¹³ The two developed a close personal and professional relationship, and overtime, many EIJ members became bin Laden's primary advisors and confidantes.¹⁴

In 1991, Zawahiri assumed official control of the EIJ; it remains unclear what precipitated this leadership change or what became of Sharif.¹⁵ Also around this time, Zawahiri and bin Laden moved their groups' respective headquarters to the Sudan, from where the EIJ continued to carry out attacks in Egypt through at least 1993. The exact timing of the EIJ's move to Sudan and the precise motivation behind it are unclear.¹⁶ From Sudan, the EIJ launched a series of increasingly bloody attacks, most notable of which were its attempted assassinations of Egyptian Interior Minister Hassan al-Alfi and Egyptian Prime Minister Atef Sedki in 1993.¹⁷ Throughout the first half of the 1990s, the EIJ was also often at odds with al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (GI/GAI) in Egypt, although there is no evidence the groups ever actively fought one another. Partially as a result of this rivalry and partially as a result of the EIJ's declining presence within Egypt, the group's funding sources within Egypt began to dry up. In response, Zawahiri sought out international donors to support the group, including in Santa Clara, California where he travelled several times. However, he was eventually forced to turn back to bin Laden.¹⁸ In order to receive funding from bin Laden, Zawahiri reoriented the EIJ away from seeking to establish an Islamic State in Egypt and towards Al-Qaeda's global brand of jihadism that aimed at destroying the United States.¹⁹

Growing tensions between the EIJ and the Sudanese government and international pressure led to the group's expulsion from Sudan in 1996. The Sudanese government's actions were largely a result of the mounting pressure from Egypt to expel the group following the EIJ's failed attempt to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1995. Additionally, the decaying state of Sudanese economy compelled it to seek foreign financial aid; however, many countries were reluctant to aid the Sudanese government while it directly supported an international terrorist organization.²⁰ Finally, in 1995, the EIJ publicly executed the two teenage sons of two of its leaders. The boys, age 15 and 17, had been captured, tortured, and sexually abused by the Egyptian intelligence services before being blackmailed into providing information on the EIJ to the Egyptian government. The Sudanese government quickly

discovered what had happened and handed over the boys to the EIJ on the condition that the boys would not be harmed. Their subsequent execution infuriated the Sudanese government and led it to finally expel the EIJ from Sudan in 1996. At this time, the Sudanese government also began to pressure bin Laden to leave the country, which he appears to have done in May 1996.²¹

After being expelled from Sudan in 1996, bin Laden and Zawahiri travelled back to Afghanistan. Relatively little is known about Zawahiri or the EIJ's activities during this time. In 1998, the EIJ faced two major setbacks which significantly undermined its capacity. First was the landmark case colloquially known as the "Returnees from Albania," in which the Albanian government agreed to extradite to Egypt 12 exiled EIJ. Among those extradited was Aymenn al-Zawahiri's brother Mohammed, who was believed to have been one of the group's top military commanders.²² Around the same time, Ahmad Salama Mabruk, the membership director of the EIJ, was captured in Azerbaijan by the CIA and eventually also extradited to Egypt.²³ Mabruk's capture was devastating for the EIJ because while the EIJ was organized in a cell structure, designed to prevent one member from being able to identify the rest of the membership if captured, Mabruk as the membership director had a computer containing the name and addresses of all EIJ members.²⁴ Thus, following Mabruk's capture, the Egyptian government was able to round up a large portion of the EIJ members remaining in Egypt, including two leaders of the group's European cell, Ahmed Ibrahim al-Naggar and Ahmed Ismail Osman.²⁵

Partially as a result of these setbacks, Zawahiri chose to merge the EIJ into Al Qaeda in 1998. There is some debate as to whether the merger was both begun and completed in 1998, or if the process was more gradual, and complete unification was not finalized until 2001. Regardless, even after 1998, EIJ members continued to play important roles in Al Qaeda's operations. For instance, Zawahiri was the logistical mastermind behind the 1998 Al Qaeda bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Furthermore, the EIJ played an important role in Al Qaeda's September 11, 2001 attacks of the World Trade Center in New York City, for which Zawahiri is thought to have led the organizational planning. Additionally, the leader and organizer of the 9/11 hijackers was a man named Mohammed Atta, who was also a former EIJ member.²⁶ Most recently, the EIJ's name has been evoked in relation to a new political party that emerged in Egypt following the 2011, which is allegedly comprised of former EIJ members. These claims have yet to be substantiated.²⁷

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

Omar Ahmed Abdul Rahman (Unknown-1993): Rahman was believed to be the spiritual leader of the EIJ. He was arrested in 2003 for his involvement, which was separate from the EIJ, in the 1993 World Trade Center Bombings and remains in jail in the U.S.²⁸

Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Farraj (1979-April 15, 1982): Farraj was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood who formed the EIJ after splitting from the Brotherhood in response to its pledge of nonviolence in 1979. He was arrested by the Egyptian government for his involvement in the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981 and executed on April 15, 1982.²⁹

Abbud al-Zumar (April 1982-1991): Zumar succeeded Farraj as the leader of the EIJ after Farraj's execution in April 1982. However, Zumar too was arrested and imprisoned by the Egyptian government around this time. Although he remained the nominal leader of the EIJ through most of the 1980s, Sayyed Imam al-Sharif took control of the group's day to day leadership in the mid 1980s. The EIJ appears to have broken ties with Zumar by at least 1991, if not before, at which time Zawahiri took formal control of the organization.³⁰

Sayed Imam al-Sharif (unknown-unknown): Sharif appears to have led the EIJ for some portion of the late 1980s following the group's relocation to Afghanistan. His role remains somewhat unclear vis a vis that of Aymenn al-Zawahiri. However, it is clear that by 1991, Zawahiri had assumed official control of the EIJ. It is unknown what became of Sharif at this point.³¹

Aymenn al-Zawahiri (1979-1998)- Zawahiri, an eye surgeon by trade, was an influential member of the EIJ since its founding in 1979.³² He became the leader of the group in 1991 and led it until merging the group into Al-Qaeda in 1998. Zawahiri also maintained a close relationship with Osama bin Laden since meeting him while fighting with the Mujahideen in Afghanistan in the late 1980s.³³ After merging the EIJ into AQ in 1998, Zawahiri became bin Laden's second in command, and is often considered to be the operational mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center.³⁴ Following bin Laden's death in 2011, Zawahiri succeeded him as the head of Al-Qaeda.³⁵

Mohammed al-Zawahiri (unknown-1998): Mohammed al-Zawahiri was the brother of Aymenn al-Zawahiri, who is thought to have been one of the top military commanders in the EIJ. He was captured by the Albanian security services in 1998 and extradited to Egypt, where he was jailed.³⁶

Ahmad Salama Mabruk (unknown-1998): Mabruk was the membership director of the EIJ. He was captured by the CIA in Azerbaijan in 1998 and extradited to Egypt, where he was later executed. On his computer, Egyptian authorities found a list with the names and addresses of all EIJ members.³⁷

Ahmed Ibrahim al-Naggar (unknown-1998): Naggar was believed to be one of the leaders of the EIJ's European cell. He was arrested following the Egyptian government's capture Ahmad Salama Mabruk, on whose computer the government found a list of all EIJ members and their addresses.³⁸

Ahmed Ismail Osman (unknown-1998): Osman was believed to be one of the leaders of the EIJ's European cell. He was arrested following the Egyptian government's capture Ahmad Salama Mabruk, on whose computer the government found a list of all EIJ members and their addresses.³⁹

B. NAME CHANGES

There are not recorded name changes for this group.

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

- 1990s: Core Strength of several hundred members (Intelligence Resource Program)⁴⁰
- 2001: 300+ (START Terrorist Profile)⁴¹

D. RESOURCES

The EIJ's early funding sources are largely unknown. What is known is that Zawahiri traveled extensively throughout both the Arab World and the West on fundraising trips for the group. Among his destinations were Iran, Lebanon, and California.⁴² It is also thought that the group may have drawn funding from covert business operations and criminal pursuits, but the specifics of these activities remain unclear.⁴³ By the early 1990s, the EIJ had come to rely heavily on funding from Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. As a result of this reliance and his close

relationship with bin Laden, Zawahiri shifted the EIJ's ideology and goals away from overthrowing the Egyptian government and more towards Al Qaeda's global vision of Jihad.⁴⁴

E. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS

Disclaimer: This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

The EIJ originated in Egypt as a splinter group of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. After its assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981 and the subsequent crackdown by the Egyptian government, many of the EIJ's leaders moved to Afghanistan, where they fought the Soviets alongside the Mujahedeen.⁴⁵ However, the group continued to carry out attacks in Egypt, and its leadership eventually relocated to Sudan in 1991.⁴⁶ The EIJ was again forced to relocate to Afghanistan after the Sudanese government expelled it in 1996. Many EIJ members also fled to Albania, where many were arrested and extradited to Egypt in 1998.⁴⁷

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

The EIJ was a radical Salafi Islamist organization. Its early ideology was heavily influenced by the writings of Sayyid Qutb and the teachings of Sheikh Omar Abd al-Rahman, both of which emphasized the notion of Jihad against the secular Egyptian state. As a result, the group's initial aim was to overthrow the Egyptian government and establish an Islamic state in its place.⁴⁸ In addition to its opposition to the government's secular nature, the EIJ was particularly opposed to Sadat's 1979 peace treaty with Israel. Similarly, to most Islamist groups in the region, the EIJ was firmly committed to the violent obliteration of the state of Israel.⁴⁹ Although the group had embraced violence as a means of achieving its goals from its inception, the group did not begin to embrace a Takfiri--the belief that all non-Sunnis are infidels--ideology until the late 1980s.⁵⁰

The group was also vehemently anti-Western but preferred to focus its resources on attacking the near enemy, the Egyptian government, rather than targeting the West.⁵¹ This, however, changed with the group's growing association to Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda in the 1990s. As the EIJ's funding sources within Egypt began to dry up in the early 1990s, Zawahiri was forced to rely more heavily on bin Laden for money. As a result of this reliance, Zawahiri was forced to re-orient the EIJ towards AQ's more global vision of Jihad against the West.⁵² This shift ultimately culminated in the EIJ's merger into AQ in 1998 and Zawahiri's co-authorship of a 1998 fatwa proclaiming Jihad against all Westerners and Western interests in the Middle East.⁵³

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

There are no recorded political activities for this group.

C. TARGETS AND TACTICS

The EIJ's most common mode of attack was high-level political assassinations. Among its most notable attacks were its 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and its 1995 attempted assassination of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.⁵⁴ However, unlike al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, the other main militant Egyptian Islamist organization, the EIJ did not target low and middle-ranking security personnel or foreign tourists.⁵⁵ The EIJ also was known for its specialty training and strategic planning skills, which it likely acquired while fighting alongside the Mujahedeen in the Soviet-Afghan War in the late 1980s.⁵⁶ In addition to assassinations, the EIJ also carried out several high profile bombings, including of the bombing of the Egyptian

Embassy in Islamabad in 1995 and the attempted bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Albania in 1998.⁵⁷

MAJOR ATTACKS

Disclaimer: These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

October 6, 1981: An EIJ member, Khaled al-Islambouli, opened fire on Sadat's box while he reviewed a military parade in Cairo, killing the president and 11 others. (12 killed, 28 wounded)⁵⁸

August 1993: The EIJ unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate the Egyptian Minister of the Interior, Hassan al-Alfi, using a vehicle born improvised explosive device (VBIED). The bomb, however, did kill two others in the Minister's car and marked the first time that Sunni militants utilized a suicide bomb, a technique originally used by Hezbollah in Lebanon. (2+ killed, unknown wounded)⁵⁹

November 1993: The EIJ mounted an unsuccessful assassination attempt against Egyptian Prime Minister Atef Sikdi using a VBIED. The bomb exploded near a girls school in Cairo as the Minister drove past, killing a young girl and injuring 21 others. Sidki escaped uninjured. (1 killed, 21 wounded)⁶⁰

June 26, 1995: In conjunction with al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and the Sudanese intelligence services, the EIJ mounted an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak while he was on a state visit to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. (no casualties)⁶¹

November 1995: The EIJ claimed responsibility for assassinating an Egyptian diplomat in Geneva. (1 killed, unknown wounded)⁶²

November 19, 1995: The EIJ bombed the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad using a truck-born bomb, killing 17 and wounding over 60 people in the vicinity. (17 killed, 60+ wounded)⁶³

1998: The EIJ unsuccessfully attempted to bomb the U.S. Embassy in Albania. (no casualties)⁶⁴

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

- United Nations Resolution 1267 Regime List: 1999 to Present⁶⁵
- British Outlawed Foreign Groups: 2000 to Present
- U.S. State Department Foreign Terrorist Organizations: 2005 to Present
- The EIJ is also designated as a terrorist organization by Canada, Australia, and Russia, but not by the EU⁶⁶

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Although the EIJ is thought to have commanded a moderate amount of support among Egyptian Islamists in the early 1980s, after its move to Afghanistan in 1986, most of the group's ties to its

original community in Egypt were severed.⁶⁷ As one observer noted, “the EIJ became a free-floating network without any real ties to its original society or to its surrounding society.”⁶⁸

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

The EIJ and al-Gama’ a al-Islamiyya (GI/GIA), the other main militant Islamist organization operating in Egypt in the 1980s and 1990s, had a mostly cooperative relationship.⁶⁹ Both groups split from the Muslim Brotherhood after its renunciation of violence in the late 1970s and cooperated closely on the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981. However, after the crackdown that followed Sadat’s assassination, one branch of GI apologized for its involvement in Sadat’s murder and denounced the EIJ, Al Qaeda, and their use of violence to achieve their goals. Another portion of GI, however, appears to have remained militant and on good terms with the EIJ, and many of its members apparently fought alongside EIJ and AQ members in Afghanistan in the late 1980s. Although there is some evidence that the two groups were often at odds with one another during the early 1990s, GI and the EIJ cooperated with one another in an unsuccessful 1995 assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Ethiopia.⁷⁰ Then in 1997, GI again publicly renounced the use of violence and opened dialogue with the Egyptian government; this effectively ended all cooperation between the EIJ and GI.⁷¹

The EIJ and Al Qaeda became allies in the early 1980s. Zawahiri and bin Laden first developed a close personal and professional relationship while fighting together in Afghanistan in the mid 1980s.⁷² Around this time, many EIJ members became bin Laden’s primary advisors and confidantes.⁷³ As the EIJ’s funding sources in Egypt began to dry up, the group became increasingly reliant on bin Laden for funding and resources. As a result of this reliance, the EIJ was forced to shift its focus from overthrowing the Egyptian government towards AQ’s global vision of Jihad.⁷⁴ The EIJ officially merged into AQ in 1998 and its members became an integral part of many of AQ’s operations, including its 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York.⁷⁵ After bin Laden’s death in 2011, Zawahiri became the leader of AQ.⁷⁶

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

Although the Egyptian government has claimed that the Iranian government funded and otherwise supported the EIJ, there is no evidence to prove this connection.⁷⁷ It is, however, clear that the EIJ received large amounts of support from the Sudanese government. Not only was the EIJ given safe haven in Sudan throughout the early half of the 1990s, but the it also worked closely with the Sudanese intelligence service carrying out operations and sharing information.⁷⁸

MAPS

- Global Al Qaeda

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