

Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade

AT A GLANCE

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HOW TO CITE

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SUMMARY

Formed: 1998

Disbanded: 2003

First Attack: August 1999: The IIPB led a force of North Caucasian and Arab mujahideen into Dagestan in an effort to establish an Islamic republic, a move that ultimately launched the Second Chechen-Russian War (unknown killed).¹

Last Attack: October 23, 2002: The IIPB collaborated with Riyadus-Salikhin and the SPIR to attack Moscow's Dubrovka Theater. The groups held over 800 people hostage and threatened to kill them if the Russian Federation did not recognize Chechnya's independence. Russian security forces were able to free the hostages; however, around 130 hostages, all of the attackers, and SPIR leader Movsar Barayev were killed during the rescue attempt (170 killed, unknown wounded).²

OVERVIEW

The Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade (IIPB) was an Islamic fundamentalist group founded in 1998 to liberate Chechnya from Russian authority and establish a unified Islamic state in the North Caucasus under Shariah law. IIPB leaders played an important role in the invasion of Dagestan that led to the Second Chechen War. Alongside the Special Purpose Islamic Regiment and Riyadus-Salikhin, the IIPB was responsible for the 2002 Dubrovka Theater incident that resulted in over 170 deaths. The IIPB had close ties to Al Qaeda (AQ) and served as a major liaison between AQ and militant organizations in the region. In 2003, the IIPB

was allegedly absorbed into the armed forces of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. Remaining IIPB militants joined the Caucasus Emirate when it formed in 2007.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade, also known as the Islamic International Battalion, was an Islamic fundamentalist group, founded in 1998 by Chechen rebel leader Shamil Basayev and Saudi jihadist Omar Ibn Al-Khattab. The IIPB was made up of North Caucasian militants, mostly from Chechnya, and foreign fighters, especially from the Arab states.³ The IIPB worked closely with the Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR) and Riyadus-Salikhin to wage war against the Russian Federation and the West.⁴ The group aimed to establish an independent Chechnya under shariah law and eventually liberate other parts of the North Caucasus.

The IIPB leaders launched several efforts to unite militants in the North Caucasus. In 1998, Basayev founded the “Congress of the Peoples of Chechnya & Dagestan” in an effort to unite Chechen and Dagestani Wahhabi militants against Russia’s colonial authority.⁵ In 1999, Basayev and Khattab led a group of about 1000 Dagestani and Chechen Islamic militants into Dagestan. However, the Dagestani population rejected and fought to expel the intervening force because they viewed it as a territorial incursion by religious radicals, threatening their sovereignty.⁶ This clash led to the start of the Second Chechen-Russian War, as the new Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin promised to eradicate the rebels and launched a bombing campaign in Chechnya.⁷

The IIPB conducted its largest attack in October 2002, at the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow. The IIPB, in conjunction with the SPIR and Riyadus-Salikhin, took over 800 people hostage and threatened to kill them if the Russian Federation did not grant Chechen independence. Russian security forces managed to free the hostages, though around 130 hostages and SPIR leader Movsar Barayev died during the rescue attempt.⁸

The Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade had close ties with AQ. Various IIPB leaders trained and fought in Afghanistan with Al Qaeda; in the late 1990s, Al Qaeda sent several hundred Arab fighters and financial assistance to the militant Islamic groups in the North Caucasus for training, recruitment, and purchase of ammunition.⁹ The IIPB allegedly served as a liaison between AQ and other militant groups in the region.¹⁰

According to Kavkaz Center, an anti-Moscow website affiliated with North Caucasus militant groups, the IIPB, alongside the SPIR, was absorbed into the armed forces of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria in late 2003.¹¹ However, Khattab’s successors to IIPB leadership, including Abu al-Walid and Abu Hafis al-Urduni, continued to play a prominent role in leading attacks in Russia and the North Caucasus. In 2007, former IIPB militants joined the Caucasus Emirate, which unified the Islamic militants in the North Caucasus.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

Omar Ibn al-Khattab (1998 to 2002): Khattab was a Saudi Arabian mujahid; he founded the IIPB and served as its leader, alongside Shamil Basayev, until he was killed by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). Khattab moved to Chechnya in 1995 to

counter the Russian government's campaign to reclaim control of the republic.¹² He played a major role in the 1999 intervention in Dagestan that launched the Second Chechen War. Throughout his leadership of the IIPB, Khattab helped to integrate foreign, mostly Arab fighters in the North Caucasus into the organization.¹³

Shamil Basayev (1998 to 2006): A Chechen rebel, Basayev co-founded the IIPB and served as the leader of Riyadus Salikhin.¹⁴ In 1998, Basayev founded the "Congress of the Peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan" in an effort to unite Chechen and Dagestani Wahhabi militants against Russia's colonial authority.¹⁵ He claimed responsibility for the 2002 Dubrovka Theater attack and various guerrilla strikes. The U.S. and U.N. Security Council have designated Basayev a foreign terrorist.¹⁶

Abu al-Walid (2002 to 2004): A Saudi-born Arab, Walid became leader of the IIPB after Khattab's death. He remained leader until his death at the hands of Russian security forces in 2004.¹⁷

Abu Hafs al-Urduni (2004 to 2006): Urduni was a Jordanian militant and leader of the IIPB after Walid's death in 2004. Urduni had direct ties to Al Qaeda.¹⁸

Yusuf Mohammed (2006 to unknown): Mohammed was a Saudi militant that allegedly fought in Bosnia, Kosovo, the Philippines, and Afghanistan, prior to entering Chechnya in 1999. He took over leadership of the IIPB after Urduni's death. He maintained the group's close relations with AQ.¹⁹

B. NAME CHANGES

There are no recorded name changes for this group.

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

- Early 2000s: Up to 400 (U.S. State Department)²⁰

D. RESOURCES

Al Qaeda sent financial assistance to the IIPB and other militant Islamic groups in the North Caucasus for training of gunmen, recruitment, and purchase of ammunition.²¹ After an October 1999 meeting between bin Laden and IIPB emissaries loyal to Khattab and Basayev, bin Laden also sent several hundred Arab militants to fight Russian forces in the region. The IIPB leadership maintained close ties to AQ throughout the organization's existence and served as a conduit between AQ and other North Caucasus militant groups.²²

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 Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade conducted most of its operations in the North Caucasus and Russia, especially in the southern region of Chechnya. The group allegedly also had agents and networks in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey.²³

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

The Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade was an Islamic fundamentalist group which aimed to liberate Chechnya from Russian authority.²⁴ The group advocated armed resistance against the West, but it focused primarily on targeting the Russia Federation, and creating a unified Islamic emirate in the North Caucasus, ruled by shariah law.²⁵

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

There are no recorded political activities for this group.

C. TARGETS AND TACTICS

AQ trained members of the IIPB to execute suicide bombings, which quickly became one of the group's main tactics for attacks. The IIPB has launched attacks and guerrilla operations on Russian forces, Chechen civilians, and pro-Russian Chechen forces. The organization also used kidnappings for ransom and hostage-taking to fight the Russian Federation.²⁶

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.

August 1999: The IIPB led a force of North Caucasian and Arab mujahideen into Dagestan in an effort to establish an Islamic republic, a move that ultimately launched the Second Chechen-Russian War (unknown killed).²⁷

October 23, 2002: The IIPB collaborated with Riyadus-Salikhin and the SPIR to attack Moscow's Dubrovka Theater. The groups held over 800 people hostage and threatened to kill them if the Russian Federation did not recognize Chechnya's independence. Russian security forces were able to free the hostages; however, around 130 hostages, all of the attackers, and SPIR leader Movsar Barayev were killed during the rescue attempt (170 killed, unknown wounded).²⁸

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

- UNSC "ISIL (Da'esh) & Al-Qaida Sanctions List": March 4, 2003 to Present.²⁹
- U.S. State Department Designated Terrorist Entities: February 28, 2003 to Present.³⁰
- U.S. State Department Terrorist Exclusion List (TEL): December 2004 to Present.³¹

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The IIPB allegedly clashed with mainstream Chechen society, as its radical Salafi ideology conflicted with the moderate Sufi Islam followed by most Chechens.³² In 1998, the Dagestani population rejected and fought to expel an intervening force composed of Chechen, Dagestani,

and foreign militants, led by IIPB leaders Basayev and Khattab. The Dagestani people viewed the intervention as a territorial incursion by religious radicals, threatening their sovereignty.³³

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

The Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade had a strong relationship with Al Qaeda (AQ). The group acted as a major channel for funding to Chechen separatist groups from AQ-linked Arabian financiers.³⁴ The leadership of the IIPB, alongside other North Caucasus Islamic groups, had numerous ties to AQ. The IIPB founder, Omar al-Khattab, was a member of AQ and allegedly met with Osama bin Laden while fighting in Afghanistan in the early 1990s. After an October 1999 meeting between bin Laden and IIPB emissaries loyal to Khattab and Basayev, bin Laden sent several hundred Arab militants to fight Russian forces in the North Caucasus. He also provided financial assistance to the militant groups to be used for training of gunmen, recruitment, and purchase of ammunition.³⁵ This relationship was allegedly reciprocal; Basayev and Khattab are reported to have sent groups of Chechen fighters to Afghanistan in 2001 to train and fight with AQ brigades. However, the extent of Chechen militants' involvement in Arab conflicts has not been verified.³⁶ The IIPB and AQ allegedly also shared numerous fundraising and recruitment networks in the west.³⁷

The Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade collaborated with other groups in the North Caucasus such as Riyadus-Salikhin, and the Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR) to launch and threaten attacks against civilians and government targets. These militant Islamic groups sought to obtain Chechen independence from the Russian Federation and the establishment of an Islamic state ruled by shariah law.³⁸ Riyadus-Salikhin allegedly drew many of its members and leaders from the ranks of the IIPB and the SPIR. Moreover, leaders from the IIPB and the SPIR collaborated from the interwar period.

Despite sharing the goal of achieving an independent Chechnya, the IIPB developed a conflictual relationship with the secessionist government of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (CRI). Members of the moderate Chechen group rejected the Islamic fundamentalism of the IIPB. Moreover, CRI President Maskhadov sharply opposed the militant intervention in Dagestani as muddying the reputation of Caucasian Muslims.³⁹

According to Kavkaz Center, an anti-Moscow website affiliated with North Caucasus militant groups, the IIPB and the SPIR were absorbed into the armed forces of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria in 2003.⁴⁰ In 2007, former IIPB militants joined the Caucasus Emirate, the successor of the CRI, which unified the Islamic militants in the North Caucasus.

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

Al Qaeda sent financial assistance to the IIPB and other militant Islamic groups in the North Caucasus for training of gunmen, recruitment, and purchase of ammunition.⁴¹ After an October 1999 meeting between bin Laden and IIPB emissaries loyal to Khattab and Basayev, bin Laden also sent several hundred Arab militants to fight Russian forces in the region. AQ supposedly also exercised significant tactical influence over the IIPB, as the IIPB launched several AQ-style suicide bombings and developed training camps for North Caucasian and foreign militants modeled after AQ camps in Afghanistan.⁴²

MAPS

- North Caucasus

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¹⁴ Vidino, Lorenzo. “How Chechnya Became a Breeding Ground for Terror.” Middle East Quarterly, Summer 2005. Web. 20 June 2012.

¹⁵ Souleimanov, Emil. “Chechnya, Wahhabism and the Invasion of Dagestan.” Middle East Review of International Affairs, vol. 9, no. 4, Dec. 2005.

¹⁶ *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2003*. U.S. Department of State, April 2004.

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¹⁹ Roggio, Bill. “Russian forces kill al Qaeda’s envoy to the Islamic Caucasus Emirate.” The Long War Journal, 22 April 2011. Web. 08 Aug. 2018.

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