Fathi al-Shiqaqi: Islamic Jihad Founder Assassinated in Malta, 1995



Dr. Fathi al-Shiqaqi (1951–1995) was a Palestinian physician and thinker, a son of Rafah refugee camp from a family driven by the Nakba from the village of Zarnuqa near Jaffa, and the founder and secretary-general of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine. The occupation repeatedly imprisoned him and deported him to Lebanon in 1988; he led his movement from Damascus until Israel's Mossad assassinated him on the island of Malta on 26 October 1995, as he returned from Libya. [1] [2] [3]

This article is part of the series "Leaders of the Palestinian Revolution Who Were Assassinated," alongside the articles on Khalil al-Wazir "Abu Jihad", Ghassan Kanafani, Yahya Ayyash and Mahmoud al-Mabhouh.

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Who was Fathi al-Shiqaqi?

Fathi al-Shiqaqi was one of the most prominent thinkers and leaders of the modern Palestinian national movement, combining medicine, ideas and resistance, and he raised the banner of resistance to the occupier while calling for national unity [3]. He paid for it with his life when the occupation pursued him far beyond the region [4] [5].

Fathi al-Shiqaqi at a glance

Item	Details
Name	Dr. Fathi Ibrahim al-Shiqaqi
Born	4 January 1951, Rafah camp; family displaced from Zarnuqa, Jaffa district [1] [2]
Education	Mathematics at Birzeit, then medicine at Zagazig University, Egypt [1] [2]

Item	Details
Profession	Paediatrician in Jerusalem and Gaza [1] [2]
Founding	Founder and secretary-general of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine [3] [6]
Prison and exile	Arrests in 1983 and 1986; deported to Lebanon on 1 August 1988 [2] [3]
Assassinated	26 October 1995, Sliema, Malta, by the Mossad [1] [3] [4]
Buried	Martyrs' Cemetery, Yarmouk camp, Damascus [2]

Timeline

Date	Event
4 January 1951	Born in Rafah camp [1]
1967	The defeat moves him from Nasserism to Islamic thought [1] [3]
1968	Enrols at Birzeit to study mathematics [2]
1974	Enrols in medicine at Zagazig University [1] [2]
Late 1970s	Forms the nucleus of Islamic Jihad with colleagues at Zagazig [3] [6] [2]
1979	His book on the Iranian revolution; arrested in Egypt [1] [2]
November 1981	Returns secretly to Palestine [2] [1]
1983	Detained for 11 months [2] [3]
1986	Sentenced to 4 years in prison plus 5 suspended [2] [3]
1 August 1988	Deported to Lebanon, later settling in Damascus [2] [3]
22 January 1995	The Beit Lid operation [1]
26 October 1995	Assassinated in Malta [1] [3]
1995	Ramadan Shallah succeeds him as leader [6]

Son of Rafah camp

Fathi Ibrahim al-Shiqaqi was born on 4 January 1951 in Rafah refugee camp to a poor family that Zionist militias had driven in 1948 from the village of Zarnuqa near Jaffa; his father was a labourer and a mosque imam [1] [2]. He was the eldest child and lost his mother at fifteen [2] [3].

He studied at UNRWA schools in the camp, finished secondary school in 1968, then enrolled at Birzeit University, graduated in mathematics and taught in Jerusalem [1] [2]. In his youth he leaned towards Nasserism, but the 1967 defeat led him to re-examine his beliefs and turn to Islamic thought [1] [3].

From Zagazig: the birth of Islamic Jihad

Al-Shiqaqi retook the secondary exam to qualify for medicine and in 1974 enrolled at Zagazig University in Egypt [1] [2]. There, in the late 1970s, he and fellow students of medicine, engineering and science – among them Ramadan Shallah – formed the first nucleus of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine [3] [6] [2].

After the Iranian revolution he wrote in 1979 a book titled “Khomeini: The Islamic Solution and the Alternative,” for which the Egyptian authorities arrested him; he was arrested again and held for four months [1] [2]. Under security pursuit he left Egypt and returned secretly to Palestine in November 1981, working as a doctor at al-Muttala (Augusta Victoria) Hospital in Jerusalem and then as a paediatrician in the Gaza Strip [2] [1] [3].

Prison and deportation

In 1983 the occupation detained him for 11 months, and in 1986 it arrested him again and sentenced him to four years in prison plus five suspended, on charges of military activity, incitement against the occupation and smuggling weapons into Gaza [2] [3].

When the First Intifada broke out, the occupation accused him of a leading role in

organising it and on 1 August 1988 deported him straight from prison to Lebanon, in flagrant violation of international law, which prohibits the forcible deportation of people under occupation [2] [3] [1].

Leading from exile

Al-Shiqaqi moved from Beirut to Damascus, which became his movement's headquarters [2]. From exile he continued to lead Islamic Jihad and to write, publishing in Beirut "A Prologue on the Centrality of Palestine and the Contemporary Islamic Project" (1989) and "The Intifada and the Contemporary Islamic Project" (1991) [2].

On 22 January 1995 the movement carried out the Beit Lid operation west of Tulkarm, in which 22 Israeli soldiers were killed and more than a hundred wounded [1].

The assassination of Fathi al-Shiqaqi in Malta

In October 1995 al-Shiqaqi travelled to Libya on a Libyan passport under the name "Ibrahim al-Shawish" to discuss with Colonel Muammar Gaddafi the plight of Palestinian refugees stranded on the Libyan–Egyptian border [3] [5]. Because Libya was under an air embargo, he left by sea for Malta on his way back to Damascus [3].

On Thursday 26 October 1995, as he walked back to his hotel in the Maltese town of Sliema, a Mossad agent approached and fired two bullets into his head, then three more, killing him instantly [3] [5]. The gunman escaped on a motorcycle where a second agent was waiting; they abandoned it about ten minutes later near a boat harbour where an escape boat stood ready [3]. Al-Shiqaqi was 44 [1] [2].

According to Israeli journalist Ronen Bergman's account, as reported by Al Jazeera Documentary, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed the assassination order, the Mossad's Kidon unit was tasked with it, an agent was recruited to track his movements, and it was decided to carry out the killing outside Syria [5]. His

assassination, a year and a half after the Oslo Accords were signed, showed that the occupation had kept up its policy of physically eliminating Palestinian leaders anywhere in the world [4].

The body’s journey and burial in Damascus

The Maltese authorities at first refused to release his body, and several Arab capitals refused to receive it. After difficult negotiations it was flown to Tripoli in Libya, then carried across Arab territory to Damascus [3]. There tens of thousands of Palestinians joined his funeral in Yarmouk camp, and he was buried in the camp’s Martyrs’ Cemetery [2] [5].

Legacy

Al-Shiqaqi left his wife, Fathiyya al-Khayyat of Jerusalem, and three children: Khawla, Ibrahim and Usama [2]. His comrade Ramadan Shallah succeeded him as leader of the movement [6]. His writings were later collected in two volumes titled “The Journey of Blood that Defeated the Sword” (Cairo, 1997) [2]. The Islamic Jihad movement, founded by a medical student in Zagazig, remains a major faction of the Palestinian resistance.

Images and video

Frequently asked questions about Fathi al-Shiqaqi

Who was Fathi al-Shiqaqi?

A Palestinian physician and thinker from Rafah camp, founder and secretary-general of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine.

Where was Fathi al-Shiqaqi’s family from?

From the village of Zarnuqa in the Jaffa district, whose people were expelled in 1948.

When was Islamic Jihad founded?

Its nucleus formed in the late 1970s among Palestinian students at Zagazig University in Egypt, led by al-Shiqaqi.

When did the occupation deport Fathi al-Shiqaqi?

On 1 August 1988, straight from prison to Lebanon.

When and where was Fathi al-Shiqaqi assassinated?

On 26 October 1995 in Sliema on the island of Malta, as he returned from Libya.

Who killed Fathi al-Shiqaqi?

Israel’s Mossad, which shot him five times in the head at close range.

Where is Fathi al-Shiqaqi buried?

In the Martyrs’ Cemetery of Yarmouk camp in Damascus.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles; the Interactive Encyclopedia entry is in English.

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4. “Mossad Assassinations Outside Palestine,” Al Jazeera Encyclopedia, 21 December 2016.
5. Shada Salhab, “‘Kill Him Outside Damascus’: Five Bullets in Shiqaqi’s Head,” Al Jazeera Documentary, 11 May 2020.
6. “Ramadan Shallah,” Al Jazeera Encyclopedia, 4 December 2014.