

Hamas

Hamas is a Palestinian Islamic extremist terrorist organization based in the Gaza Strip and West Bank that calls for the eradication of the State of Israel. Both the United States and the European Union have designated Hamas as a terrorist organization. Following internecine fighting between Hamas and Fatah in June 2007, Hamas controls the Gaza Strip.

Hamas (the Arabic acronym for Harakat Al-Muqawama Islamiya fi Filistin, or the Islamic Resistance Movement in Palestine) was established in 1988 by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, then a preacher with the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza. Its ultimate goal is the establishment of an Islamic Palestinian state ruled by Islamic theocratic law in place of the State of Israel.

The Hamas covenant, issued in 1988, is replete with anti-Semitism, and echoes the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* charging Jews with an international conspiracy to gain control of the world. In Hamas' world-view, Islamic precepts forbid a Jewish state in the area known as Palestine, and they assert the Jewish people have no legitimate connection to the land of Israel. As its covenant proclaims, "The land of Palestine is an Islamic trust... It is forbidden to anyone to yield or concede any part of it...Israel will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it..." To this end, the leaders of Hamas have denounced compromise with Israel as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause.

Funding and support for the group has traditionally come from Muslim charities around the world, sympathetic sources in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia, and most

importantly from Syria and Iran, although in recent years, both have stepped back somewhat due to Hamas' support for the rebels in the Syrian civil war.

Hamas is both a terrorist organization and a mass social, political and religious movement. It operates schools, medical clinics and youth groups. The division of Hamas into military and political/social wings has led some observers to erroneously assume that the social wing of Hamas is completely separate from its military wing. To the contrary, funds raised for the social programs of Hamas free up other funds for the military wing. Moreover, Hamas' military wing utilizes the organization's social wing for indoctrination and recruitment. The social, cultural, religious and educational institutions of Hamas, including youth groups and summer camps are well-known venues for anti-Israel and anti-Jewish hatred and have served as recruitment centers for suicide bombers.

Since 1994, Hamas has been the main organization perpetrating terrorist attacks in major Israeli cities with targets including shopping malls, cafes, buses and hotels. Its most deadly attacks include the March 2002 suicide bombing of the Park Hotel in Netanya, killing 30 and injuring 140 during their Passover seder; the August 2001 suicide bombing of the Sbarro pizzeria in Jerusalem killing 15 and injuring 130; and the June 2001 suicide bombing at the Dolphinarium nightclub in Tel Aviv, killing 21 and injuring 120, most of them youths. Following the Israeli [disengagement](#) from the Gaza Strip, Hamas has been behind the thousands of rocket attacks that have targeted Israel's population centers.

Hamas entered the Palestinian political arena and secured nearly half of the municipal seats up for grabs in the January 2005 Palestinian elections. In the January 2006 parliamentary elections, Hamas had tremendous success and won 74 seats in the 132-seat legislature, with Fatah earning a disappointing 45 seats.

Following the 2006 election, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh became Prime Minister of the [Palestinian Authority](#) while Mahmoud Abbas remained President, creating a so-called "unity government." The international community established a policy

of isolating Hamas, and suspended financial aid to the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority until it met three conditions: recognize Israel's right to exist, renounce the use of violence and terrorism and accept previously negotiated Israeli-Palestinian agreements. Hamas continues to refuse to comply with these conditions.

In June 2007, tensions between Hamas and Fatah reached a boiling point and violence broke out between the two groups in Gaza. Within a few days, Hamas prevailed. Palestinian Authority President Abbas dissolved the Hamas-led government and declared he would govern based on emergency powers. As a result, Gaza is administered by Hamas, and continues to be isolated by the international community. The West Bank is under the sole administration of the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority, which enjoys international support.

Over the years there have been a number of efforts to reconcile Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. In April 2014, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas announced a surprise reconciliation deal which included the formation of a Palestinian unity government. This Palestinian Authority's decision effectively put an end to the nine-months of US-led negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, and soured relations with Israel. To date, however, the reconciliation agreement has not progressed and has had little impact on the ground.

According to the U.S. State Department and human rights NGOs, Hamas has restricted freedom of speech and press in Gaza. The Hamas security apparatus attacks, tortures and detains those who publicly criticize its authority. Hamas affiliates have attacked journalists and other individuals, who publicly criticize their authority. Since 2007, only pro-Hamas broadcast media and PFLP-affiliated radio outlet Voice of the People have operated in Gaza. Hamas television broadcasts children's shows which glorify suicide bombings and defame Jews, spreading anti-Semitism and hatred. Hamas also imposes its religious extremism on its people, with a "morality police force," which monitors women's dress.

Gender segregation is also strictly enforced – couples walking together are often stopped and asked to prove that they are married, men are not allowed to work in women’s hair salons and women are discouraged from patronizing certain cafes.

Since 2000, Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups, have launched thousands of rocket and mortar attacks. In early years, Hamas rockets reached vulnerable southern Israeli cities such as Sderot, Ashkelon, Netivot and nearby environs, landing in or near private homes, schools and day care and recreation centers. In recent years, Hamas rockets have reached well beyond the south, reaching Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem, Be’er Sheva, and even as far north as Haifa, a distance of over 85 miles from Gaza. Two-thirds of Israel’s civilian population (equivalent to over 200 million Americans) – Jews, Muslims, Christians and others –have been directly threatened by missiles from Gaza.

Hamas has constructed hundreds of smuggling tunnels underneath the border with Egypt and stockpiled an enormous cache of weapons and associated supplies. In June 2006, Palestinian terrorists, including members of the military wing of Hamas, tunneled under the border fence in the southern Gaza Strip and attacked an Israeli military installation inside Israeli borders, killing 2 Israel soldiers, and kidnapped Cpl. Gilad Shalit, age 19. Shalit was eventually released in October 2011 after over five years of Hamas captivity in exchange for over 1,000 Palestinian prisoners. In addition, in 2014 it was revealed that Hamas has constructed dozens of “terror tunnels” which enabled its operatives to reach inside Israel to carry out terrorist attacks and kidnappings.

On December 27, 2008, following the lapse of an agreed six month Israel-Hamas “period of calm,” and in response to renewed rocket attacks, Israel initiated a military operation in Gaza, entitled [Operation Cast Lead](#). The three-week air and ground operation was intended to stop the rocket attacks on southern Israel and end Hamas smuggling of arms and related supplies.

Four years later, on November 14, 2012, Israel initiated [Operation Pillar of Defense](#) in response to intensifying rocket attacks from Gaza. The aerial military operation targeted Hamas and [Islamic Jihad](#) terrorist leadership and rocket launching and storage sites. During the 8 day operation, Hamas launched 1,506 rockets at Israeli targets. The Iranian-made and supplied Fajr-5 rockets reached as far as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

On July 7, 2014, following weeks of unceasing missile, rocket and mortar fire from Gaza on civilian centers in Israel, the IDF launched [Operation Protective Edge](#) targeting Hamas facilities, tunnels, weapons and leadership. The conflict lasted 50 days, with a series of short-lived cease fires breached by Hamas. Israel initially attacked Hamas targets by air, however, on July 17, Israel sent ground forces into Gaza for a period of just over two weeks in order to destroy Hamas's infrastructure, including rocket storage sites and infiltration tunnels which Israel was unable to destroy by aerial attacks.

During the conflict, 4,700 missiles, rockets and mortars were fired by Hamas into Israeli cities and towns, including Sderot, Ashkelon, Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem, and even as far north as Haifa, a distance of over 85 miles from Gaza. The Syrian made M-302 missile, modeled after the Chinese WS-2, which has a range of almost 100 miles, was fired at Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem. Two-thirds of Israel's civilian population (equivalent to over 200 million Americans) – Jews, Muslims, Christians and others – were directly threatened by missiles from Gaza. An open-ended cease fire was reached on August 26.