

BACKGROUND ON HAMAS

May 2013

Hamas is an Islamic extremist terrorist organization based in the West Bank and Gaza Strip 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 now 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 Ahmad 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 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 for the group has traditionally come from Iran, Muslim charities around the world and sympathetic sources in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia. Syria also provided support to Hamas, and its top political leader, Khaled Mashaal, was until recently based in Damascus. 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 many observers to erroneously assume that the social wing of Hamas is completely separate from its military wing. However, 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 are well-known venues for anti-Israel and anti-Jewish hatred, and serve 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, which killed 30 and injured 140 during a Passover seder; the August 2001 suicide bombing of the Sbarro pizzeria in Jerusalem, which killed 15 and injured 130; and the June 2001 suicide bombing at the Dolphinarium nightclub in Tel Aviv, which killed 21 and injured 120, most of them youths. Hamas has also been behind many of the rocket attacks against southern Israel.

Hamas entered the Palestinian political arena and secured nearly half of the municipal seats during the January 2005 Palestinian elections. In the January 2006 parliamentary elections, Hamas achieved tremendous success and won 74 seats in the 132-seat legislature, with Fatah earning only 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 meets three conditions: recognize Israel’s right to exist, renounce the use of violence and terrorism and accept previously negotiated Israeli-Palestinian agreements. Hamas refuses to comply with these conditions.

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 held captive by Hamas for over five years, and was eventually released in exchange for over 1,000 Palestinian prisoners.

In June 2007, tensions between Hamas and Fatah reached a boiling point with the breakout of internal Palestinian violence in Gaza. Within a few days, Hamas succeeded in ousting the Palestinian Authority’s Fatah party from power. Palestinian 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.

In April 2011, Hamas and Fatah made a surprise announcement that they had reached a reconciliation agreement which would lead to elections for both the West Bank and Gaza. To date, discussions about implementation of the agreement continue sporadically.

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 or are members of Fatah. In Gaza, all Fatah-affiliated broadcast outlets have been shut down by Hamas. 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.” Women are forbidden from riding motorcycles and wearing t-shirts and jeans on the street. 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 others have launched thousands of missiles, rockets and at Israeli cities and towns, including the southern cities of Sderot, Ashkelon and Beer Sheva. These deadly attacks target private homes, schools and day care and recreation centers. Hamas has constructed hundreds of smuggling tunnels underneath the border with Egypt, and stockpiled an enormous cache of weapons and associated supplies.

On December 27, 2008, following the lapse of an agreed six month Israel-Hamas "period of calm," Israel initiated a military operation in Gaza, entitled Operation Cast Lead. The three-week operation was intended to stop the rocket attacks on southern Israel and end Hamas smuggling of arms and related supplies.

Four years later, Israel initiated Operation Pillar of Defense on November 14, 2012 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.