

HAMAS (Islamic Resistance Movement)



History & Ideology

HAMAS (in Arabic, an acronym for "Harakat Al-Muqawama Al-Islamia" -- Islamic Resistance Movement -- and a word meaning courage and bravery) is a radical Islamic fundamentalist organization which became active in the early stages of the first Intifada, operating primarily in the Gaza Strip but also in the West Bank. Hamas was formed in late 1987 as an outgrowth of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Various Hamas elements have used both political and violent means, including terrorism, to pursue the goal of establishing an Islamic Palestinian state in place of Israel. Hamas is loosely structured, with some elements working clandestinely and others working openly through mosques and social service institutions to recruit members, raise money, organize activities, and distribute propaganda. Hamas's strength is concentrated in the Gaza Strip and a few areas of the West Bank. Hamas uses a three pronged approach to reach their goal:

1. Social welfare activities that build grassroots support for the organization.
2. Political activity that competes with other Palestinian political organizations including the Palestinian Authority.
3. Guerrilla and terrorist attacks on Israeli soldiers and civilians

In 2004 a key Hamas official said, "Peace talks will do no good. We do not believe we can live with the enemy." Hamas draws primarily from two ideological beliefs: the universalistic Islamic principles of the Muslim Brotherhood, that advocate the return of Arab Islamic society back to a traditional Islamic state, and the Palestinian tenet of popular liberation coupled with the goal of establishing an Islamic state in all of Palestine. Hamas combines Palestinian nationalism with Islamic fundamentalism. Its founding charter commits the group to the destruction of Israel, the replacement of the Palestinian Authority with an Islamist state on the West Bank and Gaza, and to raising "the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine."

Statements Taken from the Covenant of Hamas

'Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it.'
(Preamble)

"The Day of Judgment will not come about until Moslems fight Jews and kill them. Then, the Jews will hide behind rocks and trees, and the rocks and trees will cry out: 'O Moslem, there is a Jew hiding behind me, come and kill him.'" (Article 7)

"There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are all a waste of time and vain endeavors." (Article 13)

Current Leadership

Kahleed Meshal is currently considered to be the head of Hamas. He resides in Damascus, Syria. He makes policy decisions and meets with foreign leaders such as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Ismail Haniya is the senior leader in Gaza. He climbed the Hamas organizational ladder as a close aide to the late Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the group's founder and spiritual leader. He was made Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority in 2006 but was dismissed from office by PA President Abbas. Haniya refused to accept the dismissal.

Terrorists Activities

Hamas is designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, Canada, the European Union, Israel, and Japan. Since 2000, Hamas is responsible for 426 terrorist attacks primarily targeting civilians (as of July 2008). Fifty-eight of these attacks were suicide bombings, resulting in 377 deaths and 2,078 injuries (such as the Sbarro Pizzeria bombing in downtown Jerusalem on August 9, 2001, in which fifteen people were murdered, including six children ranging in age from two to sixteen and another 130 were maimed). Rocket and mortar shell fire from the

Gaza Strip continues as the Palestinian terrorist organizations' preferred form of attack. In 2007, 2313 mortars and rockets were fired at Israel, compared to 3550 in 2008). The rocket attacks have made life very difficult for Israelis in the town of Sderot and in other western Negev towns.

Hamas' Alliances: Iran, Syria, Hezbollah

Syria serves as an important base for Hamas, providing crucial infrastructure for its operational, political, military and propaganda activities. Hamas's High Command resides in Syria and runs its operations from Hamas' political office, headed by Khaled Meshaal, in Damascus. This High Command is in daily contact with Hamas including its terrorist wing, Izz Al'Din Al'Qassam.

The week prior to Hamas's electoral victory in the Palestinian elections in January 2006, Meshaal met in Damascus with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Ahmadinejad has called for Israel to be "wiped off the map" and the deportation of Israeli Jews to Europe or North America. He has denied the Holocaust. Meshaal praised Ahmadinejad for these comments.

The Lebanese terror group Hezbollah also developed a close relationship with Hamas. Shi'ite Iran is Hezbollah's main sponsor. In 1993, Hamas became the first branch of the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood to open an official office in Teheran. In April 2001, Iran hosted an "International Conference of Support for the Intifada and the Islamic Revolution in Palestine" in Teheran, which included Hamas and Hezbollah. It is not coincidental that Hamas began using Hezbollah tactics, such as the choice of certain explosives, and mortar attacks on civilian populations.

External Aid

Hamas receives some funding from Iran but primarily relies on donations from Palestinian expatriates around the world and private benefactors in Saudi Arabia and other Arab states. Some fundraising and propaganda activity take place in Western Europe and North America.

Hamas & the Palestinian Authority

The Palestinian Authority (PA) was run by Yasser Arafat until his death in 2004. In 2006, Hamas participated in the Palestinian elections and took the majority of seats. In its victory, Hamas obtained the right to name the prime minister and cabinet and run the PA's daily affairs. Mahmoud Abbas, leader of the more moderate group, Fatah, remains as President. The elections escalated an already growing conflict between Hamas and Fatah. The two groups have often had violent encounters. In June of 2007 the violence escalated again. Hamas violently removed Fatah from the Gaza Strip. Hamas maintains control of the Gaza Strip and Abbas, with assistance from Israel, controls the West Bank. The tensions and violence between Fatah and Hamas have paralyzed the Palestinians' political system and separated the Gaza Strip and the West Bank not only geographically but also politically.

Hamas & Israel

Since 2001 Hamas fired more than 10,000 rockets and mortars into southern Israel from Gaza. In 2006, Hamas won 76 out of the 132 seats in the Palestinian Parliament. In the same year, Hamas militants kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Shalit is still held today by Hamas today. A six month long cease fire between Hamas and Israel ended in December 2008. During the cease-fire Hamas continued to send missiles and rockets into Israeli towns near Gaza and used the time to stockpile and develop greater weapon technology. In December of 2008, Hamas refused to renew the cease fire. Exercising its responsibility to protect its citizens, Israel began Operation Cast Lead on December 27, 2008. The goal of this operation was to destroy the tunnels built to smuggle rockets into Gaza and to take out the rocket launchers that are used against Israeli civilians.

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