



## **Hamas**

**Deriving from the Muslim Brotherhood and unwilling to recognize Israel's right to exist, Hamas sees holy war as the religious duty of every Muslim. There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad, it states**

**Hamas: The Arabic word for 'zeal' also represents the 'Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya,' or Islamic Resistance Movement.**

**Hamas** grew out of the Muslim Brotherhood, a religious and political organization founded in Egypt with branches throughout the Arab world.

Sheikh Ahmed Yassin founded Hamas as the Muslim Brotherhood's local political arm in December 1987, following the eruption of the first intifada. Hamas published its official charter in 1988.

Hamas combines Palestinian nationalism with Islamic fundamentalism: It regards the territory of present-day Israel – as well as the Gaza Strip and the West Bank – as an inalienable Islamic waqf or religious bequest, which can never be surrendered to non-Muslims.

Furthermore, Hamas asserts that struggle (jihad) to regain control of the land from Israel is the religious duty of every Muslim.

According to section 13 of the Hamas Charter "Initiatives, and so-called peaceful solutions and international conferences, are in contradiction to the principles of the Islamic Resistance Movement... 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."

Section 15 states: "It is necessary to instill in the minds of the Moslem generations that the Palestinian problem is a religious problem, and should be dealt with on this basis."

As such, Hamas does not recognize Israel as a sovereign state. Its founding charter commits the group to the destruction of Israel, the replacement of the PA with an Islamist state on the West Bank and Gaza, and to raising "the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine."

Hamas is listed as a terrorist organization by Australia, Canada, the European Union, Israel, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and is banned in Jordan.

Hamas was outlawed by Israel in 1989. Following Israeli action in the late 1980s against Hamas leadership, some of them escaped, moving to various Arab states, mainly Jordan and Syria.

This exile of sorts is the reason why Hamas, like many other Palestinian organizations, has two separate organizational units: "internal," within the Palestinian territories, and "external," in Arab states, and to a certain extent, in other countries as well.

The two units are in contact with one another, but the external unit is considered more extreme in its positions than the internal.

### **Terrorism and militant activity**

Hamas considers terrorism a legitimate means of resistance. Hamas members started carrying out terrorist attacks starting in the late '80s, at first in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The military wing of Hamas, formed in 1992, is known as the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, to commemorate Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, the forefather of modern Arab resistance, killed by the British in 1935 at Neshur, near Haifa.

Armed Hamas cells also sometimes refer to themselves as "Students of Ayyash", "Students of the Engineer", or "Yahya Ayyash Units", to commemorate Yahya Ayyash, an early Hamas bomb-maker killed in 1996 by the Shin Bet, who used a booby-trapped mobile phone.

The first Hamas suicide bombing took place in April 26, 1993, when Saher al-tamam attacked two Israeli buses in front of a coffee shop in Mehola, killing and injuring several soldiers on leave.

Hamas is believed to have killed more than 500 people in more than 350 separate terrorist attacks since then.

Not all Hamas' attacks have been carried out by suicide bombers. The group has also accepted responsibility for assaults using mortars, short-range rockets, and small arms fire.

### **Social and welfare activities**

Since its formation in 1987, Hamas has conducted numerous social and political actions, known as Dawa. Its popularity during the 2006 Palestinian Authority election stemmed largely from its welfare and social services to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

The group runs many relief and education programs, and funds schools, orphanages, mosques, healthcare clinics, soup kitchens, and sports leagues. These programs are viewed variously as part of a sincere social development agenda, as propaganda and recruitment exercises, or both.

Some global security experts say it is not possible to separate the Dawa activities, conducted for humanitarian purposes, from the direct and indirect funding of terrorism as all the monies flow into a common fund before being channeled to the relevant activities.

### **Hamas funding**

In December 2001, the Bush administration seized the assets of the Holy Land Foundation, the largest Muslim charity in the United States, on suspicions it was funding Hamas.

As of 2003 US intelligence sources estimated that Hamas had an annual budget of \$50 million, raising much of that money through its reputation as a charity.

Historically, much of Hamas' funding has come from Palestinian expatriates and private donors in Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich Persian Gulf states.

[Iran](#) has also provides significant support, which some diplomats say could amount to \$20 million to \$30 million per year.

In addition, some Muslim charities in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe funnel money into Hamas-backed social service groups (Dawa) with a total value of tens of millions of dollars a year.

### **Hamas vs. the PLO/Fatah**

The central difference between Hamas and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO, affiliated with the Fatah party) is that Hamas is a religious movement, while the PLO is a secular nationalist movement.

While the PLO gradually became more pragmatic throughout the '80s, Hamas rejected this approach, as it sees itself as motivated by a religious commandment, and not a political decision.

Unlike Hamas, the PLO has recognized Israel since 1988.

While the PLO has said it is committed to dialogue, Hamas believes that "peace talks will do no good. We do not believe we can live with the enemy" (senior Hamas official Abdel Rantisi, April 2004).

Hamas is also well regarded by Palestinians for its efficiency in providing social services and perceived lack of corruption, compared to Fatah/PLO

### **Hamas Takover of Gaza**

Hamas boycotted the January 2005 PA presidential elections, but made a strong showing in the municipal elections, especially in Gaza, where it won 77 out of 118 seats in 10 council elections held in January 2005.

In 2006 the PA held its first national elections in which Hamas competed. It won a [surprise victory](#), claiming 76 of the 132 parliamentary seats.

The political rivalry between Fatah and Hamas soon found its way to the streets, as Fatah – which still had control of most of the PA's security apparatus – and Hamas forces began clashing through the streets of the Gaza Strip.

The Arab nations, headed by Saudi Arabia took it upon themselves to mediate between the two, and after several mediation attempts Hamas and Fatah agreed to share power. On March 17, 2007, the Palestinian [unity government](#) was sworn in.

Fatah and Hamas clashes resumed in mid-May as leaders of both parties repeatedly attempted to mediate ceasefires, but in vain.

In early June 2007, the inevitable happened: Clashes between Fatah and Hamas forces escalated further, as civil war loomed over the PA. On June 12 Hamas forces stormed Fatah's Gaza headquarters and after a short siege took it over.

The following day saw Hamas take control of the north part of Gaza, placing it under military rule. The group also began launching attacks on the Gaza Strip towns of Khan Younis and Rafah. By June 15 2007, Hamas had [taken over](#) most of the Gaza Strip.

Hamas' ravaging through Gaza and its threat to [execute](#) anyone affiliated with Fatah, forced Fatah's leadership, including Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, to flee to the West Bank city of Ramallah.

On June 14 2007, Abbas officially [dissolved](#) the Palestinian unity government and declared a [state of emergency](#) in the Gaza Strip. He consequently set up a new parliamentary base in Ramallah, naming Salam Fayyad the new Palestinian prime minister.

In mid September, Israel [declared](#) Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip a hostile political entity. The Security Cabinet authorized imposing a series of economic sanctions against Gaza, including cutting back on the supply of electricity and fuel, closing down joint industrial areas and shutting down the crossings connecting Israel and the Strip.

Hamas in turn called Israel's decision a "declaration of war."

### **Hamis leaders, past and present:**

**Sheikh Ahmed Yassin:** The founder of Hamas; released early from a 12 year jail sentence, he was rearrested in 1989, when Hamas was banned by Israel. He was released in 1997, as part of the deal to free the Mossad agents responsible for the bungled assassination attempt of Khaled Mashaal. He was killed in an IDF missile attack on 22 March 2004.

**Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi:** Co-founder of the movement, replaced Yassin as the leader of Hamas following the latter's death. A few days later, Rantissi stated in a speech given at The Islamic University in Gaza that "America declared war against God. Sharon declared war against God, and God declared war against America, Bush and Sharon." He was assassinated on April 17, 2004.

**Ismail Haniyeh:** The current Hamas leader in the territories. Haniyeh was appointed to head Sheikh Yassin's office, after the latter was released from prison in 1997. He was targeted by

the IDF for his involvement in terror attacks, and was lightly injured after a missile strike in 2003.

**Khaled Mashaal:** Hamas politburo chief. He has spent most of his life outside of Israel, in Kuwait, Jordan and now in Syria. In 1997, Mossad agents attempted to assassinate him while in Jordan. The Palestinian Authority leadership consults him on political decisions.

**Salah Shehada:** A cofounder of Hamas and the commander of its military wing, he was the number-one man on Israel's most wanted terrorists list. According to Shin Bet officials, Shehada was one of the movement's most extreme members who rejected calls from moderates to limit suicide attacks. He was directly responsible for hundreds of attacks committed against Israeli citizens and security forces. He was assassinated in July 2002.

**Mohammad Deif:** The leader of the Qassam Brigades since July 2002, when Shehada was assassinated. Israel holds him responsible for a series of massive bombings in 1996.

**Mahmoud al-Zahhar:** A co-founder of Hamas, he succeeded Rantisi in 2004. Following the 2006 elections, al-Zahhar served as foreign minister in the PA government. Prior to the elections, he was seen as a major candidate among the Hamas members for prime minister, as he was at that time the most senior official within the organization. In the end Haniyeh was chosen because of al-Zahhar's reputation as the leader of the radical arm of the movement. He has been arrested several times and spent several months in PA jails.