

Backgrounder on the Issues

HAMAS: ITS IDEOLOGY AND RECORD

Original written by Yitzhak Santis in 2008, updated July 2014

Hamas, an Arabic acronym for Islamic Resistance Movement, was elected to a position of leadership in the Palestinian Authority in January 2006. By December the two main Palestinian factions – Fatah and Hamas – had engaged in a seven month civil war, leaving hundreds of Palestinians dead, and many more wounded. On June 14, Hamas defeated Fatah in Gaza and took complete control of the territory, from which Israel unilaterally withdrew in August 2005.

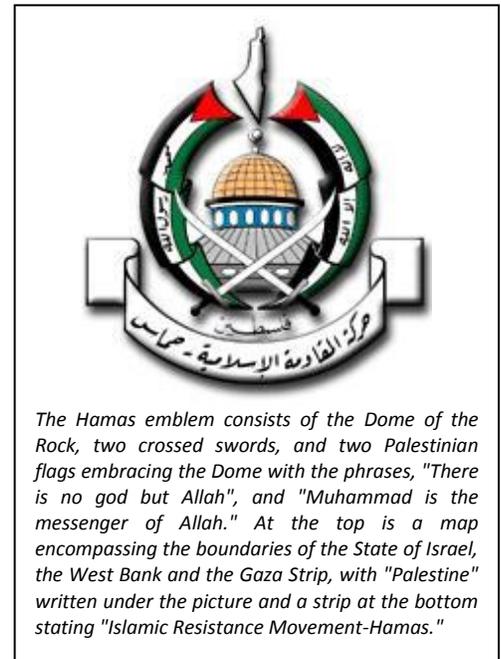
Hamas' rise to power was a tremendous blow to prospects for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. In addition to Hamas' violent record as a terrorist organization, it possesses a radical Islamist ideology that explicitly calls for the killing of Jews¹, destroying the State of Israel² and replacing Israel with a radical Islamic theocracy. This ideology is based on an underpinning of blatant anti-Semitism³ adopted from one of Europe's darkest periods (the Holocaust), and embedded deeply in Hamas' ideological manifesto it calls a "Covenant."

Since 2005, despite multiple cease-fire agreements with Israel, Hamas has launched thousands of rockets indiscriminately into southern and central Israeli towns and cities, most notably Sderot where, according to Haaretz, between "75 percent and 94 percent of Sderot children aged 4-18 exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress."⁴ Once again, in 2014, rockets are being launched at major Israeli population centers in Southern, Central and Coastal Israel from Gaza.

To better understand the current situation, it is important to have a more comprehensive understanding of Hamas' background, ideology and history.

Hamas' Ideology

Hamas is a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, a militant Islamic movement founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al Banna and dedicated to purging Egypt of Western influences, particularly British colonial rule. According to Prof. Ephraim Karsh, from the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Studies Department at King's College, University of London, Hamas views "the struggle for Palestine as neither an ordinary political dispute between two contending



¹ "The Day of Judgment will not come about until Muslims fight Jews and kill them. Then, the Jews will hide behind rocks and trees, and the rocks and trees will cry out: "O Muslim, there is a Jew hiding behind me, come and kill him.'" *Hamas Charter, Article 7*

² "Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it." *Hamas Charter, Preamble*

³ See Appendix B.

⁴ "Study: Most Sderot kids exhibit post-traumatic stress symptoms," *Ha'aretz*, January 17, 2008

nations (Israelis and Palestinians), nor even as a struggle for national self-determination by an indigenous population against a foreign occupier. Rather, it sees Palestine as but one battle in a worldwide holy war to prevent the fall of a part of the House of Islam to infidels.”⁵

In the 1960s and 70s, under the leadership of Said Qutb, the Brotherhood experienced a resurgence of popularity in Egypt, Jordan, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Brotherhood built “an impressive social, religious, educational and cultural infrastructure, which gave them a political stronghold, both in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.”⁶ Hamas carries out *da’wah* (proselytizing) activity as part of its overall strategy to gain popular support. The military and social support wings of Hamas are inseparable, and mutually dependent.

The popular-social base is maintained materially by the charity committees and ideologically through instruction, propaganda and incitement delivered in the mosques and other institutions and through leaflets. This base is the source for the recruitment of members into the units which engage in riots and popular violence.⁷

Hamas draws primarily from two ideological fronts: the universalistic Islamist principles of the Muslim Brotherhood, which endeavors to return 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: A Branch of the Muslim Brotherhood

After its founding, the Muslim Brotherhood’s popularity spread rapidly. During World War II it had actively allied itself with Nazi Germany toward the goal of ending British rule in Egypt. Also during this time the Brotherhood spread throughout the Arab world.

In 1948, after Israel’s establishment, the Brotherhood’s founder, Hassan al Banna, proclaimed that, “Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it.” (Hamas placed al Banna’s quote in their Covenant’s preamble.) In 1966, Egyptian President Nasser executed the Brotherhood’s leadership. Eventually it regrouped and for years it held seats in Egypt’s Parliament. The Brotherhood briefly held the presidency in Egypt after the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, before being ousted in a military coup in 2013. In 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood and its associations were banned in Egypt and later it was declared a terrorist organization. It boasts a very complex international financial network connecting the operations of 70 Brotherhood branches worldwide. Hamas is but one of these branches.

*“The Islamic Resistance Movement is one of the wings of the Muslim Brothers in Palestine.”
Hamas Covenant, Article 2*

The movement has not changed its basic ideology in the over eighty years of its existence, and holds a long-term view for achieving its goal of a pan-Islamic state ruled by a caliph.

A Portal for Anti-Semitism

By the late 1930s, Nazi Germany, seeking to undermine the British, established contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood, which in turn saw in Germany an ally that could further their cause. Before long the Brotherhood adopted fascist trappings, including a creed of unconditional loyalty to the leader, and a paramilitary organization whose slogan “action, obedience, silence” echoed the “believe, obey, fight” motto of the Italian Fascists.⁸ Al Banna also borrowed the Fascists idea of heroic death.⁹ Hamas’ glorification of “martyrs” dying in the act of suicide bombings echoes this fascist mode.

After al Banna’s murder in 1949, his successor Sayyid Qutb wrote a manifesto called “*Our Struggle with the Jews.*” The book has more than a passing similarity to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, which in German means “My Struggle” and whose main subject is the battle between “Aryans” and “the Jews.” Qutb adapted and transformed Hitler’s formulation of “the Jews” as “eternal enemies” of the “Aryan race” to “the Jews” as the “eternal enemies” of Islam. Qutb’s main theme is “the

⁵ Jerusalem Issue Brief, Vol. 7, No. 37, 30 April 2008 (Institute for Contemporary Affairs at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs with the Wechsler Family Foundation)

⁶ The Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Israel. Background Report on Hamas http://www.ict.org.il/organizations/org_frame.cfm?orgid=13

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Terror, Islam, and Democracy*, Ladan Boroumand and Roya Boroumand, *Journal of Democracy* Volume 13, Number 2 April 2002

⁹ *Ibid.*

Hamas Covenant Article 7

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

Jews" use Christianity, capitalism and communism as weapons in their war to subvert Islam, and are responsible for all sorts of evils, including Marxism, psychoanalysis, materialism, sexual depravity and the destruction of morals. For Qutb and his followers, all these imagined assemblages of incarnated evil known as "the Jews" represents a mortal, existential threat to Islam.¹⁰

Paul Berman writes, "The revolt against liberalism (e.g. totalitarianism) that got underway after 1914 has never run out of energy, and the impulse for murder and suicide continues to rocket around the globe, and nothing from the twentieth century has come to an end." The only difference, he explains, is the "scripts in which the revolutionary manifestos" are published: first

Gothic German and Cyrillic, but now in Arabic and Farsi."¹¹

As the Palestinian arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas fully adapted this Judeophobic imagery in its core ideology. Its Covenant states that the Jews

"have been scheming for a long time ... and have accumulated huge and influential material wealth. With their money, they took control of the world media... With their money they stirred revolutions in various parts of the globe... They stood behind the French Revolution, the Communist Revolution and most of the revolutions we hear about... With their money they formed secret organizations - such as the Freemasons, Rotary Clubs and the Lions - which are spreading around the world, in order to destroy societies and carry out Zionist interests... They stood behind World War I ... and formed the League of Nations through which they could rule the world. They were behind World War II, through which they made huge financial gains... There is no war going on anywhere without them having their finger in it."¹²

Hamas: Its Growth and Evolution

With the outbreak of the first Palestinian *intifada* in 1987, Hamas evolved into a militant organization which directed its activities not only against Israel, but also against Yasser Arafat's Fatah, the primary group within the PLO, whose ideology is largely nationalist and does not emphasize Islam.

During the 1990's, Hamas emerged as a "spoiler" as it began to use suicide bombers as a means of disrupting the peace process. By the time of the "Al Aqsa" intifada in 2000, Hamas already led the way in a war of terror against Israeli civilians.

Hamas won Palestinian legislative elections in 2006, with 74 of 132 seats. A unity government with Fatah collapsed after intensive conflict, and Hamas violently took over governance of Gaza in June 2007. Various (unsuccessful) attempts at reconciliation and unity governments have been made since then, and it is unknown if the current Hamas-Fatah agreement brokered in early 2014 will hold.

Hamas receives funding from a variety of sources: direct financial aid from Iran, donations and membership fees, fund-raising in the Arab world and the West, from Palestinian expatriates and private benefactors in Saudi Arabia and other Arab states.

Hamas' Alliances: Iran, Syria, Hezbollah

For many years, Syria served as an important base for Hamas, providing crucial infrastructure for its operational, political, military and propaganda activities. Until 2012, Hamas's High Command resided in Syria and ran its operations from the Hamas' political office, headed by Khaled Meshaal, in Damascus. Hamas moved its headquarters to Qatar due to the civil war and an apparent break with its longtime ally, Bashar al-Assad.

The week prior to Hamas' electoral victory in the Palestinian elections in January 2006, Meshaal met in Damascus with (now former) Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a Holocaust denier who had called for Israel to be "wiped off the map" and the deportation of Israeli Jews to Europe or North America.

¹⁰ See Muslim Anti-Semitism: A Clear and Present Danger, by Robert S. Wistrich, American Jewish Committee, April 2002

¹¹ "Terror and Liberalism," by Paul Berman, W. W. Norton & Company, 2004

¹² Hamas Covenant, Article 22. See: <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/mideast/hamas.htm>

Meshaal praised Ahmadinejad for these comments. In December 2005, he met Ahmadinejad in Teheran and *Al Jazeera* reported that Meshaal “praised Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president, for his ‘courage’ in having dismissed the Holocaust as a myth and calling for Israel to be moved out of the Middle East to Europe or North America.”

In 2011-2012, relations with Iran became strained over the civil war in Syria, with Hamas opposed to Tehran’s support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. However, this proved temporary and in March 2014, the Israeli Navy intercepted an Iranian arms ship destined for Gaza, which included 40 Syrian made M302 rockets that had a range of between 90 to 160 kilometers. Iranian and Syrian-made rockets have been used by Hamas in the current conflict, including one aimed at Hadera, the longest range missile launched by Hamas to date.

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 no coincidence that Hamas began using Hezbollah tactics, such as the choice of certain explosives, and mortar attacks on civilian populations. Although the Hamas-Hezbollah relationship has been under stress recently due to differing allegiances in the Syrian civil war, they remain allies in their war against Israel.

Hamas Terrorism

Hamas is responsible for hundreds of terrorist attacks since 2000, primarily targeting civilians. Over fifty of these attacks were suicide bombings, resulting in hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries.

Among the most heinous:

- **August 9, 2001:** Sbarro Pizzeria bombing in downtown Jerusalem in which fifteen people were murdered, including six children ranging in age from two to sixteen. Another 130 were maimed.
- **March 5, 2003:** A suicide bombing that murdered 17 people and wounded 53 in the bombing of a passenger bus on en route to Haifa University. Nine of the dead were children, including an Israeli Arab. Another Israeli Arab was also killed
- **August 19, 2003:** Twenty-three people were killed and over 130 wounded when a Hamas suicide bomber detonated himself on a passenger bus in Jerusalem. Five of the dead were children, including a three year old and an 11 month old.
- **August 31, 2004:** Sixteen people were killed and 100 wounded in two suicide bombings within minutes of each other on two Beersheba city buses. Among the dead was a 3 year old child.

"The people who carry out suicide bombings are not martyrs, they're war criminals, and so are the people who help to plan such attacks."

*Kenneth Roth, Executive Director
of Human Rights Watch*

During the Oslo peace process (1993 – 2000), Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad carried out at least 30 suicide attacks, killing 120 Israelis, mostly civilians. These attacks were aimed at stopping or slowing the Oslo peace process, and were a major contributing factor to Oslo’s failure. Because these attacks were deliberately aimed primarily at non-combatants with the aim of killing as many civilians as possible, the U.S. and European Union have declared Hamas a terrorist organization.

In 2006, Hamas kidnapped and held young Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in Gaza for five years. He was finally released in an exchange for 1,027 Palestinian prisoners in October, 2011.

Prior Escalations and Ceasefires

In March 2005, Hamas agreed to a unilateral ceasefire with Israel. The ceasefire was brokered by Egypt in Cairo, where Hamas and twelve other Palestinian groups met (Israel was not invited to the talks). The Cairo Agreement, as it became known, called for a period of calm (*tahdiya*). Notwithstanding this “calm” Hamas continued attacking Israeli targets,

including firing dozens of Qassam missiles from the Gaza Strip into Israeli towns and a number of attacks in the West Bank. Hamas leaders made it clear that this was merely a “tactical” move, and they were still committed to their goal of destroying Israel. Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar said after Israel’s Disengagement from Gaza in August 2005:

“Neither the liberation of the Gaza Strip, nor the liberation of the West Bank or even Jerusalem will suffice us. Hamas will pursue the armed struggle until the liberation of all our lands. We don't recognize the state of Israel or its right to hold onto one inch of Palestine. Palestine is an Islamic land belonging to all the Muslims.”¹³

The 2005 ceasefire fell apart when Islamic Jihad and other Islamist groups that were not parties to the ceasefire continued their rocket attacks on Israel, and Israel responded militarily to try to stop the attacks.

After that, thousands of rockets were fired into Israel by Hamas and other groups. Another “*tahdiya*” between Israel and Hamas was brokered in 2008, after the extensive Israeli Operation Cast Lead, to stop rocket fire and arms smuggling. A similar agreement was reached again in 2012, after the more limited operation Pillar of Defense to stop intensifying rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza.

Is Hamas moderating its position?

Over its entire existence to the present, Hamas spokespeople have not changed their anti-Israel message. For instance, Khaled Meshaal, speaking on *Al Jazeera* on January 29, 2008 said:

“We will not withdraw from our fundamental principles, from our rights and our strategic goals. The map of Palestine, for any Hamas member... is the well-known Palestinian map... As for recognizing [Israel] and amending our charter, Hamas is not the kind of movement that succumbs to pressure.”

Hamas Covenant Article 6

'The Islamic Resistance Movement is a distinguished Palestinian movement, whose allegiance is to Allah, and whose way of life is Islam. It strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine.'

Meshaal asserts Hamas’ commitment to its core ideology, what he calls their “fundamental principles. His reference to the map of Palestine “well known” to “any Hamas member” is clear: Hamas’ Covenant defines exactly the parameters of the map, as being “every inch of Palestine.” (See sidebar)

In 2007, answering a reporter’s who asked, “What is your vision of a final, long-term settlement?” a senior Hamas leader in Gaza said, “I can quote (assassinated Hamas leader) Sheikh Yassin: Hamas rules out recognizing Israel.”¹⁴

Even many Palestinians have serious doubts that Hamas will change. Prior to the 2006 elections, one Fatah official said: “Hamas is trying to replace the PA. Since 1988 their goal has been to replace the PLO. The strategy remains the same but the tactics are different. It’s the Muslim Brotherhood strategy of infiltration”¹⁵

After the announcement of a reconciliation deal with Fatah in 2014, Mousa Abu Marzouk, deputy chairman of Hamas’ political bureau, told *Al-Monitor* “Hamas will not recognize Israel...this is a red line that cannot be crossed.” He also stated that the Quartet’s requirement that Hamas recognize Israel “do not concern us one bit.”

Hamas’ long-term strategic goal remains, as always, Israel's destruction. ♦

¹³ Asharq Al-Awsat, August 18, 2005

¹⁴ Reuters, February 17, 2008

¹⁵ Cited in *Enter Hamas: The Challenges of Political Integration*, Middle East Report N°49 – 18 January 2006, International Crisis Group Conflict Prevention Partnership, European Union