

**The World's Most Complicated Conflict:
The Enduring Menace of Hamas and its Impact on Israel & U.S. Interests**

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Abstract

Hamas, or Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya, is a Palestinian Islamist organization derived from the Muslim Brotherhood that functions as both a political and militant entity, governing the Gaza Strip while opposing both the PLO and Israel. Designated a terrorist organization by the United States, European Union, and others, Hamas maintains a dual structure that includes social welfare operations alongside a paramilitary wing responsible for violence, such as suicide bombings, rocket attacks, and cyberattacks. Despite its limited conventional power, its ideological extremism and strategic alliances with states like Iran, Syria, and Qatar, and cyber groups linked to Russia, pose a significant threat, as demonstrated by its capacity to breach fortified borders during recent conflict escalations. Addressing this evolving danger and protecting U.S. and allied interests requires robust intelligence coordination among U.S. and Israeli agencies, leveraging various intelligence methods to predict and disrupt Hamas's intertwined terrorist and cyber warfare activities.

Who is Hamas?

Hamas is an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya (Islamic Resistance Movement).¹ It is a branch of the larger religio-political system called the Muslim Brotherhood, which originated in Egypt. They are the direct opposition party in the Palestinian territories' politics to the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Hamas has won elections at the Palestinian national level before, and presently holds primary political power in the region known as the Gaza Strip. They have two branch organizations, one focusing on social service, and a quasi-military one that utilizes many different forms of militant action, both with and without traditional "weapons." Hamas is designated as a terrorist organization by several countries and international entities, including the United States, the European Union, Israel, Canada, and others. It is important to

¹ NCTC

note that different countries may have varying perspectives, but it is also important to understand why they are deemed as such. They are an organization with a nationalistic belief system that alleges that there must never be a Jewish nation state to replace any Muslim states or the Muslim people will forever be “challenged,” as is stated in *The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement*,² the manual citing the beliefs and goals of the organization, “Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it...Israel, Judaism and Jews challenge Islam and the Moslem people. "May the cowards never sleep."” (*Covenant*, Articles Introduction & 28). Their beliefs conclude that, therefore, the State of Israel is both illegitimate and needs to perish for there to ever be peace and liberation for all Muslim people. It is important to note, however, that this handbook has been translated from Arabic into English, and so being wary that mistranslations are possible would be prudent moving forward with an understanding of Hamas’ reasoning for their actions against Israel. Many argue that the militancy of Israel’s borders with Palestinian territories and heavy usage of firearms to counter attacks coming from those territories are also large factors in Hamas’ strong reactions in opposition to the state, especially when considering how poor and often destitute Palestinian communities can be.³ Regardless of the reason, however, Hamas has and will continue to threaten the security of Israel and, therefore, also be of concern to those who are strong allies of the state, such as the United States.

The Threat of Hamas

Some may say that Hamas does not actually pose an adequate threat to the US or its allies. They are weak in comparison to both the militaries of the US and Israel. Their popularity is heavily

² “Hamas Covenant 1988”

³ UNCTAD

concentrated in one area of the Palestinian Territories, the Gaza Strip, with the other being primarily controlled by an opposing political party that has a peace agreement with the State of Israel, Fatah. In contrast to this, Hamas, despite its lack of militarized strength, has gained enough following and zealous personnel to commit multiple damaging terrorist attacks against the State of Israel. Some examples of the attacks they have been capable of committing: Suicide bombings in Israel, Frequent rocket launches into Israel from the Gaza Strip,⁴ and Cyber attacks towards Israel. Before a ceasefire in 2008, Hamas was releasing thousands of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel. However, they resumed after Israeli security became more aggressive in the region. These rockets have been “defended” by Hamas, utilizing the allegation that Israel’s military occupation in Gaza warrants such aggressive reprisal. These same rockets have also put Gaza's civilians at risk. When Gazan Palestinians die, it is almost always blamed on Israel by the media, which cultivates an image in the international media that Israel is an aggressor, losing them allies and making the United States lose more appeal than ever around the Middle East and North Africa. Cyber Attacks have increased, especially since the war in October of 2023 began, with Russian hackers allying themselves to Hamas.⁵ Hamas itself has both a media presence and has successfully committed cyber-attacks itself. More concerning is their allyship with direct US near-peer adversaries who support them in cyber warfare. Recently, a Russian group called “Killnet” allied itself with Hamas, promising a DDOS cyber attack. DDOS cyber attacks are characterized by flooding websites with so much traffic that they have to go offline. Anonymous Sudan, another group believed to be Russian, pledged their allegiance to Hamas in the form of “supporting the Palestinian cause.” With allies who are well versed in the ability to hack, Hamas could easily be taught more and more skills as it grows in cyber capabilities throughout the War.

⁴ “Rockets From Gaza”

⁵ “Cyberattacks Targeting Israel Are Rising after Hamas Assault.”

Hamas also has some powerful national allies, such as Iran, Qatar, Turkey, and Syria⁶. They are known to have relationships with other organizations that have historically terrorized or posed a threat to the United States, such as Hezbollah.⁷ Hezbollah is the dominant terrorist organization in Iran. The group was founded in 1982 in Lebanon. There are numerous Palestinian refugees in the nation of Lebanon, where Hezbollah operates. Hamas, for one, has been discovered to be building a military force in Iran. They have also maintained close ties although they belong to two different sects of Islam, with Hamas being made up of Sunni Muslims and Hezbollah being made up of Shi'ite Muslims. In addition to being involved in the politics of Lebanon, including the Lebanese parliament, Hezbollah is largely supported by Iran (Iran is one of only three nations in the world where the majority of the population are Shi'ite Muslims, other than Bahrain and Iraq.⁸) Part of Iran's investment in supporting Hezbollah and Hamas has been their common goal of bringing about the demise of Israel, and similarly the United States. Currently, Israel and Hamas are at war as of October due to an unprecedented attack that they were clearly capable of not only conducting, but also preventing Israeli intelligence from foreseeing. This war has presented great concerns over the support Iran has given to Hamas, including weapons, support, and training. There is also concern that the budding relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel greatly impacted this recent attack. The United States has a historic relationship with Saudi Arabia, dating back to 1931. According to the State Department, "The United States and Saudi Arabia have a common interest in preserving the stability, security, and prosperity of the Gulf region and consult closely on a wide range of regional and global issues."⁹ With the sharing of bilateral economies, the United States will be

⁶ Global Conflict Tracker: Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

⁷ "What is Hezbollah?"

⁸ "Mapping the Global Muslim Population."

⁹ "U.S. Relations with Saudi Arabia - United States Department of State."

impacted by the relationship between Israel and Saudi Arabia. If Iran wanted to disrupt that potential relationship, it may well be on the way to attempting to disrupt the US-Saudi relationship as well.

The most pressing reality the Israel-Hamas War has revealed, however, is that in fact a paramilitary group such as Hamas is not only capable of breaching the wall of one of the most militarized nations in the world, but that they would do it without concern for Israel's allyship with the United States. The United States is historically one of Israel's most useful and important military and diplomatic allies. Despite the likelihood that the United States would side with Israel and perhaps support them, Hamas still decided to attack Israel in one of the most brutal and grotesque attacks in Israeli history. This presents further evidence that Hamas in particular is a threat to the United States, not just in the next decade, but immediately.

Intelligence Methods to Combat Hamas

Collecting and analyzing intelligence will be the most integral means of preparing for potential conflict with Hamas. The most effective collection methods against Hamas have been: HUMINT, or Human Intelligence, OSINT or Open Source Intelligence, and Cyber Intelligence. Both the United States and its allies have utilized HUMINT by interrogating Hamas operatives. The IDF has publicly posted videos of interrogation with Hamas Operatives, and they are shown to reveal integral information.¹⁰ There are even American news articles, such as on NBC, that include the interrogation of Hamas fighters by Shin Bet, one of the two intelligence agencies in the State of Israel. Recently, during the conflict that began in 2023, Shin Bet has been able to gain vital information from nearly 50 Hamas operatives at least, some of whom self-declared themselves to be part of the Nukhba Force, an elite commando unit of the Hamas paramilitary

¹⁰ "In Interrogation Video, Hamas Terrorists Confirm Group's Hideout under Gaza Hospital."

wing.¹¹ OSINT has also been very useful and will continue to be so in understanding this group. OSINT was utilized to discover the location of some of the hostages taken by Hamas into the Gaza Strip by utilizing geolocation techniques on their own social media posts on the “X” (formerly Twitter) platform¹². Hamas also runs its own media centers for both children and adults, producing magazines and television shows alike, which are full of propaganda. One source of this is their Television Station, Al-Aqsa TV. The most popular show on the channel was called “Pioneers of Tomorrow” and featured children as well as figures dressed as various anthropomorphic animals that made antisemitic remarks and promoted the use of weapons.^{13 14} Hamas, in addition to having social media and publicly available media on their television station, they also have publicly made known their manifesto and founding documents, which outline their interpretation of Jihad, beliefs about their mission to bring about the demise of the Jewish people, and even their opinions on Fatah (formerly the Palestinian Liberation Organization.) For example, in their *Covenant*, there is a section regarding their “Views on Other Palestinian Nationalist Movement,s” and this includes, among other groups, the PLO. They state that while they are grateful for the work that the Palestinian Liberation Organization does, they cannot support an organization that is not explicitly religiously Muslim by their definition, implying that the actions Fatah takes to show its support for Israel’s existence and non-violence pact are inherently secular. However, they do declare that “The day the Palestinian Liberation Organization adopts Islam as its way of life, we will become its soldiers, and fuel for its fire that will burn the enemies.”¹⁵ It is well-known that Hamas and Fatah have both historically and currently interacted in a mixed fashion, especially with Fatah’s nonviolence agreement with

¹¹ “Inside Shin Bet Interrogation,,

¹² “Hamas took at least 64 people hostage”

¹³ “Hamas Al-Aqsa TV: A Mickey Mouse Character Teaches Children...”

¹⁴ Seraj.tv

¹⁵ Hamas Covenant

Israel. One important differentiation is that Fatah recognizes the State of Israel. Their proposals have historically included returning to the 1967 borders. They also engage in negotiations with Israel, as opposed to the more militant actions of Hamas.¹⁶ This kind of information is a public declaration of their bylaws, intent, and their relationship with other notable groups of concern in the conflict, making it prime for OSINT. Finally, Cyber Intelligence will be essential for further understanding the conflicts Hamas is capable of conducting in the future. As mentioned in an earlier paragraph, Hamas has allies in the form of a number of hacker and cyber-attacking groups online, especially some from Russia, a direct antagonist of the United States. Hamas itself has used Cyber Intelligence collection methods repeatedly, and invaded secure cyber spaces in ways that indicate they have their own powerful cyber abilities.¹⁷ That, in addition to their media production, indicates that Hamas likely has a fulsome online presence that may be essential for targeting to find things such as plans for attacks. A robust understanding of media is of special concern, as it can be used to plan cyber attacks. This is exacerbated when paired with allyship with powerful nations, especially ones with a history of utilizing sophisticated cyber warfare, such as Russia and China.¹⁸ ¹⁹ Russia has been able to use cyber attacks to spread misinformation, espouse propaganda, commit espionage, undermine foreign elections, and even attack foreign leaders. China similarly utilizes cyber capabilities to attempt to spread Chinese communist values, steal information, and manipulate what its citizens are able to know and understand about world affairs and foreign powers. These ideologies, combined with this expansive cyber capability, would be disastrous in consequence if weaponized by a group such

¹⁶ “Hamas and Fatah: How Are the Two Groups Different?”

¹⁷ “Palestine’s Hamas Moves Online”

¹⁸ “China Cyber Threat Overview and Advisories”

¹⁹ “Russian Cyber Units”

as Hamas. And although Hamas is a relatively poor, small entity, cyber attacks against powerful Western nations via extremist groups are not a non-existent phenomenon.²⁰

Why The United States Should Be Involved in The Conflict

Planning for an attack via Hamas would require the United States intelligence community, in particular the CIA, FBI, and other IC members, working together with Israeli intelligence, such as Mossad, to gather necessary intelligence to predict future attacks from Hamas. Collaborative efforts will remain foreseeable as the war between Israel and Hamas continues to escalate. For example, during the Cold War, Israel provided the United States with a vital eye in the MENA region during heightened Soviet-US tensions. The intelligence Israel has been able to provide the United States with has been invaluable, and Israel itself remains one of the only nations in the Middle Eastern region that is friendly to the US and supports its interests and Western values.²¹ Because both Israel and the US share values as such, the recent attacks by Hamas, while centered against Israel, also pose a threat to the United States. They pose a threat to American Jewish people (and Americans who follow Islam and Christianity, or converts to Judaism) who visit Israel regularly on trips such as Birthright, or for heritage or religious purposes. Americans make up the largest number of tourists to Israel every year, with nearly 900,000 visitors.²² Over 800,000 Jewish young adults have attended Birthright, which offers at least three distinct programs to enable visits to the nation.²³ These large numbers are contrasted with the moderate population size of Israel currently, making Americans a likely demographic to be harmed by the conflict that occurs there. In the recent attacks from Hamas in Israel, at least 30 Americans have

²⁰ Cyber Attacks by Terrorists and other Malevolent Actors: Prevention and Preparedness With Three Case Studies on Estonia, Singapore, and the United States

²¹ “Israel’s Intelligence Contribution to US Security: The Cold War Years.”

²² “Israel Travel and Tourism”

²³ “Birthright, Israel FAQ”

been pronounced deceased already (a number during the Tribe of Nova Trance Music Festival attack), with at least 12 Americans among those taken as hostages.²⁴ Both numbers continue climbing every week as more are discovered or killed. Recently, of the 242 total hostages taken by Hamas, 9 bodies were found to be dead in the Gaza Strip, which the IDF claims demonstrates evidence of being killed in captivity or during capture.²⁵ Hostage negotiations are ongoing, as more and more are released, a number having been released from captivity during a cease-fire.²⁶ The fact that, compared to the US and Israeli militaries, small, powerful terrorist organizations have the confidence to claim their own fighters freed from prisons before they are willing to release hostages, shows even further evidence of their potential threat to the United States. Similarly, 9/11, the most recent massive attack from a foreign power on US soil, was conducted by a relatively smaller, less powerful terrorist organization that had been able to militarily and diplomatically outwit the United States and its allies multiple times. Numbers and situations will change with time, but long-term, the threat of Hamas remains very real and as pertinent as ever. They pose a threat to the controversially moved US embassy in Jerusalem. In 2018, President Donald Trump moved the US Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. The Trump White House Archives official website goes as far as to state that “President Trump kept his promise, announcing that the United States would begin recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and officially open our Embassy there,” a decision and statement that angered Palestinians greatly and asserting the US stance that they recognize Israel as a sovereign nation, but do not recognize the Palestinian territories as such.²⁷ They produce cause for concern of cyber attacks from Hamas towards the US, as those grow in prevalence from Hamas towards Israel. Hamas’ Cyber espionage operations

²⁴ “Fate of American hostages up in the air with little prospect of stalled hostage talks resuming soon | CNN politics”

²⁵ “2 Israeli hostages’ bodies were recovered near Al-Shifa Hospital, Army says”

²⁶ “How many hostages has Hamas released? tracking how many remain in Gaza”

²⁷ National Archives and Records Administration

target valuable intelligence from Israel, rival Palestinian factions, and even within its own organization, providing strategic and operational leverage. Hack-and-leak operations aim to shape public opinion and create scandals by strategically releasing stolen documents. The group's information activities can significantly impact geopolitics, influencing elections and stability in the wider Middle East. The use of cyber and information capabilities provides alternative ways for Hamas to engage and sway audiences.²⁸ As of October 2023, Hamas' actions have prompted multiple security alerts from the US embassy to Israel. Even without the current war being considered, there is the long-term concern from the countries that support Hamas, as they are the United States' two most concerning allies (as indicated in intelligence briefings and reports issued by various members of the IC)²⁹, other than North Korea and Iran. Both China³⁰ and Russia³¹, the US's most near-peer and prominent adversaries, invited Hamas and other Palestinian authorities to speak with their leadership as recently as 2023. The threat of Iran, as mentioned earlier, is, of course, ever-present in relation to Hamas. Their continued monetary and moral support, as well as their evidenced animosity towards Israel and the United States, are of paramount importance when interpreting intelligence regarding Hamas. Hamas's actions, along with support from countries like Iran, are a long-term threat to stability in the Middle East and broader U.S. interests. To handle this, the United States needs a thorough and collaborative approach. It's crucial to monitor and address Hamas activities, both in physical actions and in the digital realm, to protect American interests, citizens, and diplomatic assets in the region.

²⁸ “The Cyber Strategy and Operations of Hamas: Green Flags and Green Hats”

²⁹ DNI “Annual Report”

³⁰ “China Inks ‘Strategic Partnership’ with Palestinian Authority as It Expands Middle East Presence.”

³¹ “The Reasons and Goals behind Relations between Hamas and Russia.”

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