

# CRS Report for Congress

## **Hamas: The Organizations, Goals and Tactics of a Militant Palestinian Organization.**

**OCTOBER 14, 1993**

Hamas had its beginnings in 1967 as a wing of the Muslim Brotherhood. 1

In 1978, the same organization was registered with Israeli authorities as a nonprofit, religious organization under the name, 'al Mujama,' under the leadership of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, who was also head of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza. 2 At first, the new organization spent most of its time promoting Islamic views and winning support for the Islamic movement in Palestinian institutions, universities and mosques. 3

Footnotes at end of article.

Hamas, as it is currently organized, was founded in December 1987 just when the intifada (uprising) in the occupied territories was starting. The Hamas agenda is based largely upon the principles of Islamic fundamentalism that were gaining momentum throughout the Arab world at that time. The goal of the founders was to become directly involved in the intifada and ultimately gain control of the Palestinian movement and bring it more in line with fundamentalist Islamic thought. Most observers believed that the outbreak of the intifada was a spontaneous event and the Hamas founders were just one of many Palestinian opposition groups, including the PLO, that were vying to gain control of the demonstrations.

Hamas success in winning quick support among the Muslim population of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank was due in large part to its Islamic origins and its earlier activities as a religious and charitable institution. One observer tells how reports and instructions were often announced over mosque loudspeakers. 4 The Israeli embassy says that, within a week of its publication in August 1988, the Hamas covenant was posted in mosques throughout the territories.

Part of the reason for Hamas success in gaining popular support may have been frustration among Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza stemming from the PLO's inability to make headway toward a solution of the 'Palestinian problem.' Muslims in particular were attracted to Hamas because of

its identification with the Islamic fundamentalist movement which set it apart in many ways from the PLO.

Little specific information has been made public about the actual size and organization of Hamas. Its supporters and sympathizers are estimated in the tens of thousands. It is generally known that the organization is structured along functional lines, with sections dedicated to military, religious, informational, and security activities, but the actual numbers of people assigned to any of the sections is not a matter of public knowledge. The command and control structure apparently took several years to finalize and was then changed because of losses of personnel and intense Israeli surveillance and security sweeps. Hamas has maintained its status as a religious and charitable organization. Its involvement with educational and social activities qualifies Hamas to receive donations required by Islamic law from the Muslim community (zakat). The Jordanian government allows Hamas to maintain offices in Amman and operate openly as a foreign political organization. 5

Hamas is reputed to be a more efficiently run organization than the widely dispersed and heavily structured PLO with its organizational overhead and diverse activities. The Hamas share of religious donations is rising in relation to the PLO. According to some sources, a large amount of money is coming from devout Muslims in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states who used to contribute to the PLO before it sided with Iraq during the Gulf war. 6 Hamas also supported Iraq in the war but was much less conspicuous because it was so closely identified with the Palestinian population in the territories. Hamas wisely avoided open confrontation with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.

The military wing of Hamas is known as the Izz al Din Qassam Brigades, the force behind most of the violence and killings attributed to Hamas. The cells operate under the control of four or five relatively independent geographical commands. An Israeli journalist who follows Hamas closely estimates that the full time membership of the Qassam cells may be as few as 60 to 100 due to arrests and deportations over the past two years. 7 That estimate seems low in view of the wide pattern of Hamas attacks, but the secrecy of the Qassam cells make it very difficult to determine actual numbers. The cells are also thought to have become more proficient in disguising their operations and the size of their memberships.

Perhaps more important than the actual size of Hamas is the amount of support it has gained in the occupied territories. One observer tried to determine the level of popular support from the results of elections for seats on the councils of professional organizations such as engineers, doctors, lawyers, UN agencies, and the chambers of commerce for Hebron and Ramallah. During the 1990-92 period, Hamas candidates won an average of 30 percent of the seats in those elections which approximates estimates made on the basis of polls conducted by Arab newspapers and independent observers. 8

Hamas is still making a strong showing in these elections, though it has sustained some personnel losses resulting from arrests and deportations. A report by Reuters in May 1993 said that Hamas won 10 seats compared to 16 for the PLO in an election held by a 5,000 member professional union in Gaza. Such elections are watched as indicators of public support because general or municipal elections are banned. Hamas usually has the backing of the Muslim Brotherhood in these elections. An Israeli author who

follows the situation believes that Hamas has also been the beneficiary of alliances with other Islamic groups `that neither identify with nor support it.' 9 Estimates of overall support for Hamas are much higher in Gaza where the Muslim population is stronger in its support for the Islamic groups.

- Hamas has significant differences with the PLO. The ideology of Hamas is a synthesis of pan-Arab Islamic religious ideals and Palestinian nationalism. Hamas states its intent to establish an Islamic state in Palestine and its covenant draws heavily upon Islamic ideology and Quranic verses. The PLO charter, on the other hand, is a secular document with a call to Palestinian nationalism. Senior PLO officials have said that they will install a western style democratic form of government in an independent Palestine. 10
- Both charters say that Israel must be forced from all of what was known as `Palestine' prior to 1947 (the 1922 League of Nations mandate included what is now Israel, Jordan, and the occupied territories; the British later changed this to exclude the Kingdom of Jordan east of the Jordan River), and that armed force is the only way to bring that about--Hamas uses the term `jihad' or religious war. 11 However, in late 1989, the PLO changed its position in regard to a Palestinian state and expressed willingness to accept a state comprising the West Bank and Gaza in confederation with Jordan and the continued existence of Israel. It has since been negotiating indirectly with Israel on the basis of land for peace and UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. Willingness to negotiate with Israel over territory is probably the most significant difference between the PLO and Hamas. It is possible, though no by no means clear, that differences over the form of government could be negotiated.
- Hamas relies heavily upon its use of violence. This is clear from the content of pamphlets regularly distributed throughout the occupied territories since the first month of Hamas existence. The pamphlets include statements such as: `increase attacks with knives, grenades, and guns against the cowardly Jews in their houses and turn the day into darkness and the nights into intolerable hell \* \* \* view every Jewish settler as a target to be killed, whose blood and money are for the taking.' 12
- Palestinians in the West Bank apparently favor the PLO over Hamas, but Hamas' popularity among Gaza's 750,00 Palestinians has grown over the past five years to a point where Hamas has seriously challenged the PLO for popular support. On several occasions armed clashes have broken out between followers of the two factions in that area. Most observers believe that should Hamas supplant the PLO as spokesman for the Palestinians in the territories, it would mean the end of the peace talks with Israel and open warfare between Hamas and Fatah. 13

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The PLO apparently believes that it has reason to feel threatened by Hamas because of the appeal of its fundamentalist Islamic ideology. On occasion, the PLO has attempted to settle its differences with Hamas or coopt the organization. Soon after the intifada started, Arafat attempted to include Hamas in a

United National Command (UNC) formed by the PLO to exercise overall control of the uprising. 14 Sheikh Yassin made a counter demand that Hamas be allotted a large share (reportedly 40 percent) of the seats on the Palestinian National Council and other governing bodies of the PLO. Hamas also insisted that the PLO change its platform to conform with the Hamas charter.

There have been periodic reports of agreement and cooperation between Hamas and the PLO, but it appears that their differences may be too wide to bridge. Apparently, there has been some cooperation at the tactical level, if reports are true that Hamas and PLO activities collaborated in several attacks on Israelis and Palestinians in the territories, but the attacks might also have been independent actions by local activities. Mohammed Nazal, a Hamas leader and its representative in Amman, Jordan, said recently that differences between the secular PLO and the fundamentalist Hamas are irreconcilable. 15

Hamas has apparently staked much of its reputation on the fate of the peace talks, apparently believing that a breakdown or perceived failure of the talks would propel Hamas into the leadership of the Palestinian movement. It is also possible that signs of a breakthrough in the talks could foster changes in the Hamas position if it hopes to play a part in forming a government on the Palestinian side. Arab newspapers have reported that Hamas is already considering changes to its charter that would moderate its position regarding the talks and other issues between it and the PLO. These reports may well be premature in view of the continued hardening of the Hamas position and reports that it has threatened Palestinian delegates to the negotiations. Hamas argues that the representatives have no authority to speak for the Palestinian people.

There is no single definition of terrorism acceptable to all. Most definitions include, but are not limited to the following elements: the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence against civilians and civil operations to achieve political goals through fear, intimidation, or coercion. It usually involves a criminal act, often symbolic in nature and intending to influence an audience beyond the immediate victims.

Hamas argues that it is at war with Israel and that its attacks have all been against military targets in Israel and the occupied territories. However, according to Israeli reports and U.S. press accounts, the victims of attacks claimed by Hamas have included not only uniformed soldiers but also Israeli civilians (some women and children), off-duty military and police personnel, and Palestinian civilians. The U.S. State Department concluded that: 'various elements of Hamas have used both political and violent means, including terrorism, to pursue the goal of establishing an Islamic Palestinian state in place of Israel.' 16 In February, 1989, Hamas claimed responsibility when two Israeli soldiers were kidnapped and murdered in separate incidents while hitchhiking home from their posts in southern Israel. The body of one was recovered. More recently, December 13, 1992, an Israeli border guard, Nissim Toledano, was kidnapped near his home in Lod. The kidnappers claimed to be members of the Al Qassam brigade of Hamas and demanded the release of Hamas leader, Sheikh Yasin, from prison in exchange for the sergeants's release. The Sheikh made a public plea for the soldier's release, but the body of the victim was discovered two days later. 17 Recent attacks claimed by Hamas against crowded civilian buses and random citizens at work or near their homes indicate that Hamas no longer attempts to argue that it attacks only military targets. On July 1, 1993, Hamas openly claimed responsibility for an attack against

a Jerusalem public bus in which two women were murdered.

Hamas maintains that evidence linking it with the attacks is often no more than pamphlets found in the pockets of the perpetrators when they were killed or captured, sometimes days later, or that blame was affixed solely on the basis of inflammatory Hamas inspired graffiti on the walls near the scene of the attack. In the month before the borders were closed between Israel and the territories in March, 1993, fifteen Israeli civilians were killed in violent attacks by Palestinian Arabs. Pamphlets printed and distributed by Hamas found in the pockets of the persons who committed the crimes clearly urged the attacks. One pamphlet dedicated certain days 'to stabbing settlers to avenge the blood of the martyrs killed by the (Israeli) special units.' Another urged Muslims to consider settlers and other Jews as targets 'which should be terminated.'

Hamas also admits to having executed Palestinians accused of collaborating with Israeli authorities. A transcript of a training film allegedly made last summer by the Qassam Battalions tells how Hamas operatives kidnapped Palestinians accused of collaboration and then forced confessions before executing them. 18 The film quotes a member of the al Qassam brigade as having said that any Palestinian who helps Israel against other Palestinians is 'more of an enemy than Israeli soldiers.' In June 1992, Amnesty International confirmed that 172 Palestinians 'were killed, apparently by other Palestinians, some after being tortured; most were suspected of being collaborators with the Israeli authorities.' 19 The State Department says that nearly 200 Palestinians were killed by other Arabs in the occupied territories in 1992, as opposed to 140 in 1991. However, the State Department made no attempt to assign responsibility to specific groups. 20

In Mach 1993 the State Department announced that it had broken off informal contacts with Hamas representatives in Amman, Jordan. Media reports said that State Department policymakers believed that a limited dialogue with Hamas and fundamentalist organizations in other countries might add to knowledge of such organizations and possibly help solve crises like the stalemate over the Israeli deportation of suspected Hamas activists in December 1992. It came as a surprise to most that such contacts were taking place, in view of U.S. policy toward terrorism. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher announced that talks would be suspended with 'people associated with Hamas.' Mr. Boucher said that U.S. embassies maintained a variety of contacts with people to discuss the development of political Islam and Islamic currents in the Islamic world. He said that the talks with Hamas had not been a political dialogue, only contacts.

Events in the past year brought international terrorism more sharply to the attention of the American public. An illegal alien shot a number of CIA employees on their way to work at CIA headquarters in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C. and then the New York Trade Center was bombed in February 1993. Americans were shocked that terrorism had come to the United States and that some immigrant groups in this country had ties to radical organizations overseas, particularly the Middle East. While there has been no public evidence that Hamas was involved in either the shooting or the bombing, the incident came on the heels of an Israeli warning several months earlier that Hamas was directing its operations in the occupied territories from command and control centers in the United States. 21 The series of events prompted congressional hearings on the terrorist threat. In related actions, bills were

introduced in both Houses that would statutorily identify Hamas as a terrorist organization and prohibit any of its officers from entering the United States. 22

The United States has taken a strong stand against Hamas because of its use of violence and its opposition to U.S. interests in the Middle East. There is added concern on the part of U.S. policymakers because of reports that Hamas is receiving support from Iran and is collaborating with its Lebanese client, Hizbullah. 23 The Hamas representative in Iran denied the PLO allegation that it had received \$30 million from Iran in 1992, but he acknowledged Iranian assistance to 'Palestinian groups.' There are few particulars about Hamas collaboration with Hizbullah; the inference is that Hamas militants have been given refuge in southern Lebanon where they receive training and support from Hizbullah guerrillas. The accumulation of evidence was persuasive enough to convince the State Department to add Hamas to its list of groups known to use terrorist means, issued in April 1993. 24

1 Article two of 'The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement,' published August 18, 1988, uses the phrase 'wing of the Muslim Brotherhood.' Some observers believe that Hamas is actually the military wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, noting that Hamas members that have been deported from Israel are working closely with the Muslim Brotherhood in surrounding countries, collecting funds and recruiting new members from the larger organization.

2 Sheikh Yasin was arrested in 1983 on weapons charges and later released. He was arrested again in 1989 for his alleged connection with the killings of several Israelis. He is still in prison.

3 'Jane's Intelligence Review' reports that in its initial stage, Hamas was actively promoted by the Shamir government in the hope that the Islamic organization would help weaken or undermine support for the PLO. [Jane's Intelligence Review': 'Hamas: An Assessment' by Paul Wilkinson, July 1993, pp. 313-14.]

4 See Clinton Bailey: 'Hamas the Fundamentalist Challenge to the PLO,' The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Research Memorandum number nineteen, April 1992. p. 2.

5 'Patterns of Global terrorism: 1992,' op. cit.

6 See for example a report in the Washington Post, 'Global Network Provides Money, Haven,' August 3, 1993. p. A1.

7 See Ehud Ya'ari, 'The Metamorphosis of Hamas,' 'The Jerusalem Report,' January 14, 1993. p. 25.

8 Bailey, op. cit.

9 Ehud Ya'ari: op. cit. p. 24.

10 Jamal Khashoggi in al Hayat, April 23, 1993.

11 The word `jihad' is an Arabic word meaning to exert effort. The effort need not be violent. The noun form of the verb has come through usage to mean `holy war.'

12 (Hamas leaflet 65, November 1990).

13 (Fatah, The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Palestine Communist Party).

14 The UNC was to include all of the main constituent factions of the PLO See Baily, Op. cit., pp. 10-11.

15 Nasrawi, Salak. ` Hamas Reconciliation Breaks Down.' Associated Press, April 3, 1993.

16 `Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1992,' op. cit., p. 37.

17 It was in response to this murder that Israel deported to Lebanese territory 415 Palestinians in December, 1992, most of them linked to Hamas.

18 New York Times, April 16, 1993. p. A31.

19 Washington Post, July 10, 1992. p. A14.

20 `Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1992,' op. cit., p. 18.

21 The FBI denied the thrust of the Israeli allegations about the command and control structure within the United States, but, according to a State Department official, Hamas has been openly involved in propaganda and fund raising activities in this country.

22 Identical bills submitted by Congressman Deutsch (H.R. 1279) and Senator D'Amato (S. 503) would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to provide that members of Hamas be considered to be engaged in a terrorist activity and ineligible to receive visas and thereby excluded from admission into the United States.

23 Hizbollah is a terrorist organization widely believed to have been responsible for the bombing of the Marine barracks and the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon in the mid-1980's and for the subsequent kidnapping and imprisonment of American citizens in that country.

24 `Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1992,' op. cit., p. 37.

**CRS REPORT ON HAMAS -- HON. CHARLES E. SCHUMER (Extension of Remarks - October 14, 1993)**

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**HON. CHARLES E. SCHUMER**

*in the House of Representatives*

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1993**

- *Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. Speaker, I attach for the interest of my colleagues a revised edition of a report on the Hamas organization written by Congressional Research Service entitled 'Hamas: The Organizations, Goals and Tactics of a Militant Palestinian Organization.'*
- *This report was previously issued under the misleading title, 'Hamas: Freedom Fighters or Terrorists?' and diluted the avowedly terrorist nature of the organization.*
- *This seemed especially inconsistent with our own policy particularly when this year, for the first time, Hamas was included in the State Department's list of terrorist groups issued in April 1993.*
- *After inquiries by myself and the Anti-Defamation League, a human relations organization that combats anti-Semitism, and all forms of bigotry and discrimination, CRS gave assurances that the report would be revised.*
- *I am gratified to note that CRS revisions addressed all the points brought to their attention by the Anti-Defamation League in its analysis of the report. The result is a more indepth and accurate characterization of both the Hamas organization and U.S. policy.*
- *This revised report reflects the high standard of the work Members of Congress have been able to consistently count on from the Congressional Research Service.*