



## About GTTAC

The Global Terrorism Trends and Analysis Center (GTTAC) was created by Development Services Group, Inc., and our partner TraCCC of George Mason University to support our work for the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Counterterrorism (No. GS10F-0166K, 19AQMM18F2561). The GTTAC Record of Incidents Database (GRID) collects and classifies opensource data on terrorism incidents globally and is used to support the development of the Annex of Statistical Information for the Country Reports on Terrorism. Data used in this report are from the GRID. Views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the United States government.

For more information

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## What Is Hamas?

### Origins

Founded in 1987 during the First Intifada (or Uprising), Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist political party and militant group, emerged as a response to perceived shortcomings in the Palestinian political landscape. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and other activists played pivotal roles in its establishment. It quickly became the second-largest Palestinian political faction, after Fatah.

### Ideology

Hamas's ideology is rooted deeply in Islamism, a political interpretation of Islam seeking to establish Islamic rule. 1988 saw the release of its charter, emphasizing the return of all Palestine to Muslim control under Islamic Sharia rule, the liberation of Jerusalem, and resistance against Israeli occupation through armed struggle.

### Formation, Evolution, and Group Structure

Hamas gained early popularity through charitable work during the First Intifada, addressing gaps in Palestinian institutions. Its evolution into a political and military force led to tensions with Fatah. In a significant shift in 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections, securing control of the Gaza Strip. Structurally, Hamas consists of three interrelated wings. The social welfare and political wings are the public faces of the group's social, administrative, political, and propaganda activities. The military wing is engaged principally in covert activities such as surveillance, procuring weapons, and guerilla and terrorist attacks.

### Capacity

Operating both politically and militarily, Hamas's Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, established during the early years, spearhead the entity's armed resistance. In 2023, its force was estimated to have between 30,000 and 40,000 fighters. Asymmetric warfare, guerrilla tactics, and rocket attacks characterize its military approach.

### Common Tactics

Throughout its existence, Hamas employed a range of tactics. Suicide bombings, rocket attacks, and asymmetric warfare against Israeli military and civilian targets marked its armed resistance. Distinctively, the use of tunnels for smuggling weapons and infiltrations became a strategy. The Global Terrorism Trends and Analysis Center has also recorded many Hamas terrorist incidents targeting Palestinian civilians and assassinating leaders or representatives of other political organizations, Fatah in particular. Hamas also uses drones, improvised explosive devices, short- and long-range rockets, mortars, small arms, rocket-propelled grenades, man-portable air defense systems, antitank missiles, and unmanned aircraft systems in its attacks. Iran is its leading supplier of drones, missiles, and rockets, but all arms and explosives have been smuggled through the region's porous borders.

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## Funding

Hamas is funded from a variety of sources, mostly from outside of Gaza and the West Bank. Charities, foreign-based foundations, wealthy individuals, corporations based in the Gulf states, as well as states sponsoring terrorism are the main sources. Additional sources include illicit trade activities in South America’s tri-border region (Argentina, Border, Paraguay) and virtual currency fundraising. Funds make their way to Hamas through a variety of (known) ways, including Gaza-based cryptocurrency exchanges, suitcases of cash and money transferred through foreign banks, the informal hawala system (informal broker exchanges without money movement), and a Lebanon-based money exchange company to transfer funds from Iran to Gaza.

## International Relations

Designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union, and Israel, Hamas garners support from states such as Iran, Qatar, and Türkiye. Hamas’s longstanding relationship with Iran is marked by political and military collaboration. Iran has been a key supporter, providing financial aid, weapons, and training to Hamas’s military wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. The collaboration is often evident in shared strategic interests, including opposition to Israel, with Hamas and Hizballah functioning as important components of Iran’s “resistance axis.”

## Timeline



### 1987: Foundation and Early Years

**Founding:** Hamas is founded during the First Intifada by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and other Palestinian activists in response to Israeli rule.

**Charter:** The group releases its charter in 1988, outlining its ideology and objectives, including the establishment of an Islamic state in historic Palestine.

### 1990s: Rise in Influence

**Social Services:** Hamas gains popularity by providing social services and filling gaps left by existing Palestinian institutions.

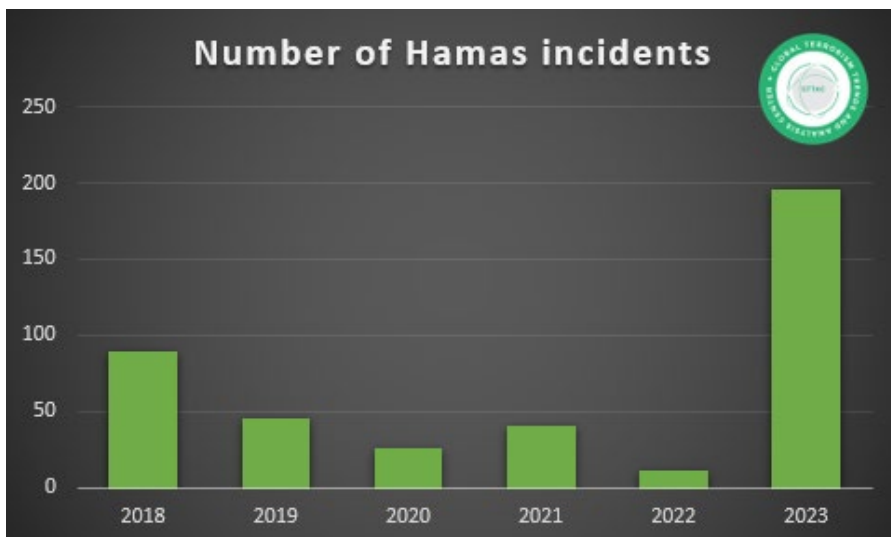
**Oslo Accords:** Rejecting the Oslo Accords, Hamas intensifies its armed resistance against Israel.

### Early 2000s: Suicide Bombings and Political Ascent

- **Suicide Bombings:** Hamas gains widespread notoriety for a series of suicide bombings targeting Israeli civilians during the Second Intifada.
- **2006 Elections:** Surprising many, Hamas wins the Palestinian legislative elections, leading to its control of the Gaza Strip.

### 2007: Internal Strife and Gaza Takeover

- **Fatah–Hamas Conflict:** Hamas and Fatah fight in Gaza, a unity government is formed and dissolved within 3 months.
- **Gaza Takeover:** Hamas takes control of the Gaza Strip, resulting in a political divide between Gaza and the West Bank.



## 2012: Operation Pillar of Defense

- **Conflict With Israel:** In response to rocket attacks from Gaza, Israel launches Operation Pillar of Defense. Hamas and other Palestinian factions engage in hostilities.

## 2014: Operation Protective Edge

- **Gaza War:** Another conflict erupts as Israel launches Operation Protective Edge in response to rocket attacks. Thousands are killed, and extensive damage occurs in Gaza.
- **Casualties:** An estimated 2,200 Palestinians and 73 Israelis lose their lives.

## 2017: Reconciliation Attempts

- **Reconciliation Efforts:** Hamas and Fatah engage in reconciliation talks, culminating in an agreement to transfer administrative control of Gaza to the Palestinian Authority. This and subsequent agreements have fallen through.

## 2018–19: Protests and Escalation

- **Great March of Return:** Hamas supports the Great March of Return protests at the Gaza–Israel border, leading to clashes and about 200 Palestinian casualties.
- **Escalation With Israel:** Tensions rise, resulting in periodic escalations, including rocket exchanges and skirmishes along the border.



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## 2020–22: Ceasefires and Continued Tensions

- **Ceasefire Agreements:** Periodic ceasefire agreements are brokered between Israel and Hamas, temporarily reducing hostilities.
- **COVID–19 Pandemic:** The COVID–19 pandemic permeates the region, disrupting daily life and exacerbating existing challenges.

## 2023 and October 7

- **Ongoing Tensions:** Tensions persist with sporadic clashes, mostly in the West Bank.
- **October 7:** Hamas launches a large, coordinated attack from Gaza into Israel. More than 1,300 Israelis are killed, and more than 200 hostages are taken. The incident involves a land, sea, and air assault, employing rockets, drones, semiautomatic weapons, incendiary weapons, rocket-propelled grenades, grenades, and booby traps. Tactics used include rapid armed assault, mass violence, sexual assault and rape, executions, hostage-taking, and property and infrastructure theft and damage.

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