

Hamas Activity to Restore Security Governance in the Gaza Strip after the Ceasefire Dr. Igal Shiri

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Overview¹

The ceasefire in the Gaza Strip which began on October 10, 2025, provided Hamas with an opportunity to deploy its security forces in areas evacuated by the IDF and to demonstrate governance, despite the severe damage they suffered during the war.

The Hamas security forces focused on fighting local clans accused of collaboration with Israel or identified as power centers which might threaten the movement's position in the Strip. The security forces carried out raids and arrests, confiscated equipment, and executed "collaborators" in full view of local residents.

▶ Hamas violence received support from the "resistance" [terrorist] organizations in the Gaza Strip and the umbrella organizations of clans which disowned the "collaborators" among them, but provoked angry reactions from the Palestinian Authority and the United States. However, Hamas claimed that their activity was intended to prevent "anarchy and chaos," but reportedly agreed to stop public executions.

In ITIC assessment, as long as there is no actual change in the control of the Gaza Strip as part of the second phase of the ceasefire agreement, in which Hamas is supposed to relinquish power and disarm, the movement can be expected to continue using its security forces to attack any groups which might threaten it. The objective of using force, especially the executions, was to instill fear in the local population and ensure that Hamas retained influence even if it relinquished its governmental power centers. However, if fighting against Israel resumes, the militias and clans opposed to Hamas can be expected to take action to expand their areas of influence throughout the Strip.

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The Functioning of the Hamas Internal Security Forces during the War

Since Hamas seized power in the Gaza Strip in 2007, its internal security forces have been important both as a symbol of governance and as a means of enforcing its control. Throughout the Gaza Strip War which broke out in October 2023, the internal security and police forces of Hamas operated in areas not under IDF control. However, according to Hamas, Israel used a "deliberate policy" of attacking local security personnel "maintaining public order" to undermine civil stability and create internal chaos (Hamas ministry of the interior Telegram channel, October 10, 2025).²

According to data issued by the Hamas government, at least 787 police officers and security personnel were [allegedly] killed in Israeli strikes during the war (Hamas government media information center, October 5, 2025). Also killed were senior members of the internal security forces, including the commander of Hamas general security, Sami Ouda,³ and his successor Rashid Jahjuh; the head of the internal security, Bahjat Muhammad al-Madhoun; Ayman al-Salih, who headed the general security Khan Yunis sector; head of internal sec in southern Gaza, Hussam Shahwan; and the police chief, Maj. Gen. Mahmoud Salah.⁴

A "senior officer in Hamas' security forces" admitted that the movement had lost about 80% of its control over the Strip and that armed clans were filling the void. He noted that six armed groups associated with powerful local clans had exploited the void and had access to money, weapons and men (BBC website, July 6, 2025).

² For further information, see the February 2024 ITIC report, <u>Hamas Governance in the Gaza Strip:</u> <u>Activity, Institutions, Administration and Public</u>

³ Hamas general security is a secret body within Hamas responsible for uncovering "collaborators," providing security for the organization's senior figures and assets inside and outside the Gaza Strip, and suppressing opponents of Hamas's rule. It is also responsible for building an intelligence picture that assists senior terrorist operatives in decision-making and in carrying out terrorist activity against the State of Israel, as well as for the propaganda Hamas spreads to the Gazans to consolidate legitimacy for its rule.

⁴ For further information, see the weekly ITIC reports, Spotlight on Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, and the monthly summaries of anti-Israeli terrorist activity in the various arenas.

Deployment of Hamas Security Forces during the Ceasefire

According to the 20-point American plan for the future of the Gaza Strip, a temporary transitional government, based on a non-political Palestinian technocratic committee, would manage day-to-day affairs in the Strip, while Hamas would not be part of the government and would be required to disarm (White House, October 9, 2025). However, during the first stage of the ceasefire, which went into effect on October 10, 2025, it was not specified who would govern the Gaza Strip, an issue belonging only to the second, as yet unnegotiated stage of the agreement, and therefore Hamas hastened to exploit the vacuum to consolidate its rule.

When the ceasefire went into effect IDF forces withdrew from large parts of the Gaza Strip, including Gaza City, the refugee camps of Jabalia, al-Nuseirat, and al-Bureij, Beit Lahia, Deir al-Balah, and al-Mawasi in Khan Yunis, and positioned themselves along the "yellow line" inside the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, October 10, 2025). As a result, armed Hamas security forces were deployed in Gaza City and other areas evacuated by IDF forces (al-Risalah, October 10, 2025).





Map of IDF force deployment after the ceasefire, along the "yellow line" (IDF spokesperson, October 10, 2025). Left: Deployment of armed Hamas forces in city streets (al-Risalah, October 10, 2025)

▶The Hamas ministry of the interior confirmed that its forces had been deployed in areas from which the "occupation army" had withdrawn, stating that they "would work diligently to restore order and deal with the chaos spread by the occupation during the past two years." It also called on Gazans "to avoid any behavior that could endanger their lives" and to cooperate with the security forces (Hamas ministry of the interior Telegram channel, October 10, 2025).

▶"Local sources" reported that Hamas had enlisted about 7,000 of its "security personnel" to regain control of areas vacated by the IDF and five new governors had been appointed, all with

military backgrounds and some who had previously commanded brigades in the military wing. Reportedly, some of the armed "security personnel" wore civilian clothing and others, the blue uniforms of the Gaza police (BBC, October 11, 2025). Hamas' government media information office denied the report and claimed it was incorrect (Ra'i Agency Telegram channel, October 12, 2025).

Many Gazans said they were in favor of the Hamas operatives' return to the streets. Abu Fadi al-Banna, 34 years old, from Deir al-Balah, said, "After the war ended and the police were deployed in the streets we began to feel safe. They started organizing traffic, cleaning the markets and removing street vendors who blocked the roads. We felt protected from thugs and thieves." Hamdiya Shamiya, 40 years old, who had moved from northern Gaza to Khan Yunis in the south, added, "We are starting to breathe a little. Our lives now require patience, order, and security, which the police have begun to restore. We have already noticed an improvement" (France 24, October 14, 2025).

Hamas' Struggle Against the Clans

Background information

▶The idea of recruiting clan and large family leaders to lead the Gaza Strip instead of Hamas was first raised by Israel. Reports were published stating that Israel was in contact with clan heads in the Gaza Strip to convince them to replace Hamas and manage the distribution of aid and perhaps become a governing body after the end of the war. However, most clan leaders did not respond to the call, mainly due to their ties to Hamas.⁵

▶The cooperation between Israel and local anti-Hamas forces in the Gaza Strip was first made public on June 5, 2025, when Israel admitted that it was arming the Popular Forces militia of Yasser Abu Shabab from Rafah (Israeli media, June 5, 2025).

▶In recent months, other local militias began operating against Hamas, with some admitting that they were acting in coordination and with the support of Israel. Generally, the clans operated from humanitarian compounds in destroyed sites in areas under IDF control and under its protection, while inviting families to join them after screening. The militias were armed and operated in coordination with the headquarters of Abu Shabab's Popular Forces (*The Independent* in Arabic, October 11, 2025).6

⁵ For further information, see the March 2024 ITIC report, <u>The Palestinian perspective on alternatives</u> <u>for managing the Gaza Strip "the day after"</u>

⁶ For further information about the militias, see the Appendix.

Hamas Units

When the ceasefire went into effect Hamas began to demonstrate its governance in the Gaza Strip and immediately launched a campaign against those marked as "collaborators" with Israel during the war and who might pose a threat to the movement's status. The activity was led by two security bodies:

- The Sahm ("arrow") Unit, which is a police force established by the Hamas ministry of the interior in March 2024 to stabilize internal order, protect aid convoys, monitor market prices, and prosecute thieves and collaborators with Israel. It grew out of informal youth groups and was later officially adopted with the support of the terrorist organizations and local clans. It has police officers and terrorist operatives among it members, including from the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, and carries out secret arrests, interrogations, and punishments, including, in certain cases, executions. Since November 2024 the unit has conducted numerous operations against gangs who robbed humanitarian aid convoys and against collaborators. Israel attacked the unit several times, killing dozens of its operatives and wounding hundreds, and on May 10, 2025, its commander, Saqr Taleb, was eliminated (Al Jazeera, June 29, 2025).
- **The Rada Force** is the enforcement arm of "resistance security" in the Gaza Strip. It was established at the end of June 2025 to deal with internal chaos, pursue thieves, robbers, and "agents," and address moral and security offenses. For the most part it deals with collaborators with Israel and those who hide them, while conducting public deterrence operations (Al Jazeera, October 16, 2025).





Right: Sahm operatives (Shehab Agency, June 25, 2025). Left: The Arabic reads, "Sahm – security unit for the pursuit of collaborators in Gaza" (Al Jazeera Instagram channel, July 1, 2025)

According to Hamas-affiliated media outlets, all clans in the Gaza Strip were called upon to demonstrate "national, social, and moral responsibility" and hand over to the authorities any

family member involved in crimes or acts of violence. Hamas' security forces warned that "anyone who continues to harbor criminals will be considered party to the crime" (Amsak Amil's Telegram channel, October 12, 2025). The Hamas ministry of the interior claimed that "the door is open for repentance and there is a general amnesty for members of gangs not involved in bloodshed to regularize their status." It was noted that the ministry was taking the necessary measures for the security and social conditions in the Strip and that anyone who had joined "gangs" but was not involved in murder was called upon to surrender himself to regularize his legal status (Hamas ministry of the interior Telegram channel, October 12, 2025). [Bullet] According to Hamas security forces, as part of implementing a "comprehensive security operation in all parts of the Gaza Strip" against "collaborators with the occupation and anyone who provides them protection or cover," hideouts were raided and "agents" who allegedly tried to seek refuge among civilians were "neutralized." According to claims, there was an increase in the number of Gazans who surrendered to the security forces "because they recognized the prestige of resistance security" and in response to calls "to return [to the right path]" (Quds Agency, October 15, 2025; al-Aqsa Channel, October 17, 2025).

Hamas Confrontation with the al-Mujaida Clan

▶Even before the official announcement of the ceasefire, Hamas began clashing with rival clans. On October 3, 2025, clashes were reported between Sahm Unit operatives and the al-Mujaida clan, when Hamas forces raided the al-Mujaida neighborhood in Khan Yunis after morning prayers, using heavy weapons and RPG fire. Four members of the al-Mujaida family and 20 Hamas operatives were reportedly killed in the clash (journalist Ayman Handiq's Telegram channel, October 3, 2025; Hamza al-Masri's Telegram channel, September 3, 2025). It was also reported that IDF forces carried out an aerial attack on three cars belonging to the Sahm Unit (Tel al-Sultan neighborhood in Rafah Telegram channel, October 3, 2025). The IDF spokesperson confirmed that an aircraft attacked an armed group of about 20 Hamas operatives carrying out a raid on Gazans in the humanitarian area in Khan Yunis. Several terrorists using Palestinian children as human shields were also eliminated, without harm to uninvolved civilians (IDF spokesperson, October 3, 2025).

▶On October 13, 2025, after IDF forces left the area, according to reports the al-Mujaida clan decided to surrender and handed over its weapons to Hamas operatives. It was also reported that the clan claimed it would disown its family members who had "committed treason" and tried "to sabotage the internal front, security, and stability" during the war (al-Siyad, October

13, 2025). The clan then denied the reports in the Israeli media about ties with "the Israeli occupation" and condemned claims that Israel had protected the clan during their clashes with Hamas operatives. The clan also objected to the use of its name as an "occupation" media asset and stressed the unity of the Palestinian people against the common threat (al-Mujaida clan Facebook page, October 15, 2025).

The Confrontation with the Dughmush Clan

▶On October 10, 2025, as soon as the ceasefire went into effect, a clash broke out between Hamas security forces and the Dughmush clan in Gaza City, when armed clansmen killed Hamas operative Muhammad Imad Aqal, son of Imad Aqal, who had commanded Hamas' military wing and was eliminated by the IDF in November 1993 (al-Siyad Telegram channel, October 10, 2025). During the exchange of fire Hamas operative Na'im Bassem Na'im, son of Hamas political bureau member Bassem Na'im, and Salah Al-Ja'farawi., a Hamas-affiliated journalist and popular social media activist, were also killed (al-Siyad Telegram channel, October 12, 2025; Muta'aba min al-Midan Telegram channel, October 12, 2025). The Sahm Unit Telegram channel, October 12, 2025).

The Dughmush clan claimed in a statement that it had undergone "cruel persecution by the Israeli occupation" and had paid a high price, but chose to stand with "honor and loyalty to the nation." The clan denied involvement in the killing of Muhammad Aqal and claimed it was united with the rest of the Palestinian people and the various "factions," calling on its members not to be tempted by rumors and defamatory campaigns (Dughmush family Facebook page, October 13, 2025). The head of the clan, Nizar Dughmush, reported that 33 members of the clan had been killed in the clashes. He claimed that the clan had been approached by Israel to cooperate during the war but refused. He added that eight members of the clan who had been executed by Hamas had previously surrendered after Hamas promised not to harm them and to bring them to trial. Dughmush stressed that for now there was no mediation to resolve the conflict between the clan and Hamas (al-Arabiya, October 19, 2025).

Executions

The Hamas security forces also publicly executed "collaborators" with Israel. On October 13, 2025, seven "collaborators" were executed in the presence of dozens of people in Gaza City.

⁷ Terrorist organizations.

The Rada Force claimed responsibility for executing collaborators belonging to the Dughmush and Habib clans after they had been involved in clashes with the "resistance" before the ceasefire (al-Aqsa TV, October 13, 2025).



Public execution of members of the Dughmush clan (al-Aqsa TV, October 13, 2025)

▶On October 15, 2025, Hamas terrorist operatives fired an RPG at the house of the Abu Ajwa family in the al-Shuja'iyya neighborhood of Gaza, after the *pater familias*, an officer in Palestinian intelligence, was accused of collaboration with Israel. The attack killed two children and their mother (Mustafa Asfur's Telegram channel, October 15, 2025).

▶On October 18, 2025, Hamas terrorist operatives killed former prisoner Hisham al-Saftawi at his home in the al-Bureij refugee camp (Hamza al-Masri's Telegram channel, October 18, 2025). "Sources in the Strip" reported he was executed because of his involvement in stealing about 80 kilograms of gold, possession of stolen weapons and ammunition, including M16 rifles and thousands of bullets, and involvement in additional security and moral offenses (Mish Heik Telegram channel, October 18, 2025).

Reactions to Hamas' Actions

Signs of Support

According to a statement published on behalf of the "Palestinian resistance organizations," they welcomed the executions of suspects accused of collaborating with Israel. The statement claimed the operation "enjoys full support from all resistance factions to restore security and stability." The "factions" [terrorist organizations] called on all Gazans to cooperate with the security forces and to report suspects and inciters, and warned that lawbreakers would be prosecuted under the Palestinian revolutionary law without immunity (Shehab News Agency, October 15, 2025).

▶The head of the al-Astal clan, Muhammad al-Astal, and sheikhs in Khan Yunis said that during the war a tribal council was established to ensure the entry of aid and to recruit people to protect convoys and displaced persons' camps. They claimed the council now functioned as

an auxiliary body to Hamas' security forces in eliminating armed groups accused of collaborating with Israel and of killing Palestinians. Al-Astal noted that the field executions targeted those alleged to have shot at or killed displaced children, women and other civilians. He added that several families had disowned their relatives after they had been linked to the killings and expressed full support for the "enforcement bodies in the Gaza Strip" (Shehab News Agency, October 15, 2025).

▶The head of the Higher Council of Palestinian Clans, Hajj Salman al-Maghni, said the tribes coordinated fully with the security forces in the Gaza Strip and supported them with all their strength for the sake of maintaining security and social unity. He said that the rogue groups collaborating with Israel had to pay the price for their actions, adding that the Gazan tribes and families would continue to serve as the "sword and rifle in the hand of the resistance" in the struggle against the "occupation" (Jenin Battalion – Hornets' Nest Telegram channel, October 14, 2025).

The Hamas-affiliated National Gathering of Palestinian Clans and Tribes praised Hamas' security forces for their ongoing activity to restore order and called on all Islamic and national factions to cooperate and support them. The Gathering also announced the removal of tribal and family protection from anyone found to have threatened public safety or taken part in disorder, and instructed all families to hand criminals and offenders over to the authorities immediately (Shehab News Agency, October 14, 2025). The head of the Gathering, Alaa al-Din, claimed that Hamas operatives attacked "only crime gangs," not innocent people. He added that without the raids a "civil war" might have broken out. Al-Din alleged that during the war the armed clans cooperated with Israeli forces, attacked and looted aid trucks, and engaged in murder, looting and erecting roadblocks (al-Khamsa News Agency, October 16, 2025).

Criticism of Hamas

▶ The Palestinian Authority (PA) strongly condemned the executions without trial carried out by Hamas in the Gaza Strip, in which dozens of civilians were killed, and labeled them "abominable crimes outside any legal and moral framework." The PA called the executions a grave violation of human rights and the rule of law and reflected Hamas' determination to impose its rule through force and terrorism while the Gazans were suffering the consequences of the war and the "blockade." The PA reiterated that Palestinian law was the sole authority for accountability and that such actions undermined national unity and destroyed the social fabric. It called for an immediate halt to the violations, for those responsible to be brought to

justice, and for the restoration of the rule of law and the PA's legitimate institutions in the Gaza Strip, saying that only then could the chaos be ended and national trust strengthened (Wafa, October 14, 2025).

▶The head of the Palestinian National Council, Rawhi Fattouh, said the executions violated the PA's Basic Law, the principles of justice and human rights, and harmed national unity. He reiterated that only Palestinian law and legitimate judicial institutions constituted a basis for accountability and that deviating from them was a crime against justice and the national system. He added that repression and executions created chaos, amplified the suffering caused by Israeli aggression and were meant to entrench the internal schism and strengthen Hamas' unilateral rule at the expense of national interest (Wafa, October 15, 2025).

▶ Fatah condemned the killing of the released prisoner Hisham al-Saftawi and accused Hamas of wielding a "policy of murder, intimidation and violence against Gazans, which serves as a direct continuation of the Israeli project to dismantle Palestinian society and cause Palestinians to migrate." Fatah added that Hamas preferred to preserve its "security control" and impose its authority on the Strip by force without regard for the Gazans' suffering, destruction and loss. Fatah called the killing of the former prisoner "a link in a chain of crimes that includes executions, arbitrary arrests and systematic violence" (Wafa, October 18, 2025). ▶ The Fatah-affiliated Organization of Clans in the southern Gaza Strip districts condemned the executions and stressed that they harmed national unity. The organization said the Supreme Authority for Clan Affairs, which operated under the Hamas ministry of the interior, had been abolished by PA chairman Mahmoud Abbas in 2019 and now has no authority in the Strip. The Organization also demanded that Hamas relinquish rule in the Gaza Strip and the powers of indirect negotiations with Israel and transfer them to the PA, stressing that "the tribes were, still are and will be the unifying Palestinian national factor" (al-Qastal News Agency Telegram channel, October 20, 2025).

▶The United States president initially supported Hamas' activity and claimed its operatives "are going in and cleaning out the violent gangs" (CNN, October 15, 2025). Later he threatened that "if Hamas keeps killing people in Gaza, which is not the deal, we will have no choice but to go in and kill them" ("Truth Social," October 16, 2025).

Despite the criticism, Hamas defended its heavy-handed approach to the clans and those perceived as collaborators with Israel. "A Hamas security source" said that the eliminations were carried out "in accordance with the rules of engagement" against wanted men who

refused to surrender (al-Arabiya, October 15, 2025). Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem claimed that the executions were "part of law enforcement and dealing with a state of anarchy and chaos," and were "fully supported by all Palestinian factions" (Quds Agency, October 18, 2025). After the United States warned that Hamas intended to attack local residents, the movement said that "the situation on the ground is the opposite" and that "the police forces in Gaza are fulfilling their national duty in pursuing the gangs to protect the Gazans and have with broad public support" (Hamas Telegram channel, October 19, 2025). However, in response to international pressure and threats, according to reports, Hamas informed Egypt it had decided to stop public field executions in front of civilians in order to maintain civil order (advisor Ahmad Abu Iyad's Telegram channel, October 16, 2025).

Appendix: Militias Opposing Hamas

▶Below is a list of the prominent anti-Hamas militias which operated in the Strip until the ceasefire (Dr. Eman's X account, September 26, 2025; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 14, 2025):

• The Popular Forces in eastern Rafah, led by Yasser Abu Shabab is one of the largest and best-known militias operating in open cooperation with Israel. Its main base is in the al-Sufi neighborhood in Rafah. Estimates put the militia at about 1,500 people of whom about 600 are armed fighters.



Yasser Abu Shabab (Abu Shabab's Facebook page, May 19, 2025)

• A militia in eastern Khan Younis led by Hussam al-Astal, aka Abu Son, a former officer in the PA security forces, was sentenced to death in 2022 by the Hamas government on charges of involvement in the assassination of the Hamas operative and engineer Fadi al-Batsh in Malaysia in 2018. In September 2025 al-Astal announced the formation of a militia which he called a "counterterrorism force," and estimates put about 40 armed operatives at his disposal. The militia's center is in Kizan al-Najjar, a village emptied of residents near Khan Yunis, and according to al-Astal, his militia

receives food, water, shelter equipment and supplies from Israel (*Times of Israel*, September 22, 2025).



Al-Astal with his men. The Arabic reads, "No place for Hamas dogs (Hussam al-Astal's Facebook page, September 17, 2025)

- A militia led by Yasser Handik, a local Fatah activist from the Barbakh clan operating in the Khan Yunis area. He reportedly operates in cooperation with Israeli security forces, yet he released a filmed statement denying any cooperation with Israel or with the PA, and claimed that his activity was only within the framework of revenge for the killing of two of his brothers by another clan (Quds Agency, July 3, 2025; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 17, 2025).
- The al-Mujaida clan in Khan Yunis, which Hamas claimed collaborated with Israel and with Abu Shabab's Popular Forces militia.
- A militia led by Rami Halas in the al-Shuja'iyya neighborhood of Gaza City, whose Fatah-affiliated Halas clan is large and influential. After Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in 2007 violent clashes broke out between Hamas security forces and clan members. According to reports, Rami Halas, a Fatah activist from Tel al-Hawa, is supported and protected by the Israeli security forces (Ynet, July 3, 2025). According to Hamas, Halas' militia conducts surveillance, attacks and abductions under the supervision of an Israeli intelligence officer (Palestinian Press Agency, September 22, 2025).

190-25

⁸ For further information, see the August 2008 ITIC report about the suppression of Fatah in the Gaza Strip, <u>Fatah suppressed in the Gaza Strip:</u>



Rami Halas on a Hamas wanted poster (Palestinian Press Agency, September 22, 2025)

• A militia led by Ashraf al-Mansi in the northern Gaza Strip operates in the Jabalia and Beit Lahia refugee camps in the northern Strip and in the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood in Gaza City and cooperates with Yasser Abu Shabab's militia. Hamas accused al-Mansi of running a network working for Israeli intelligence and said he has about 20 operatives with criminal records who carry out sabotage and espionage. It was further claimed that the network killed Hamas operatives and operated in hospitals (Rada Force Telegram channel, September 15, 2025; Palestine Online, September 16, 2025; al-Siyad Telegram channel, September 26, 2025).



Ashraf al-Mansi and militia members (Yasser Abu Shabab's Facebook page, September 26, 2025)

• The Dughmush clan in Gaza City is one of the most important and powerful in the Gaza Strip and its power center is in Tel al-Hawa and the Sabra neighborhood in Gaza City. Some clan members were previously identified with Salafi-Islamist groups, chiefly Jaysh al-Islam, and fought armed clashes with Hamas security forces, although they also cooperated, such as the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in June 2006.⁹

⁹ For further information, see the September 2008 ITIC report, <u>Hamas security forces exerted massive</u> <u>military power to confront the Dugmush clan and operatives of the Army of Islam, a network affiliated with Al-Qaeda.</u>

◆ The Abu Khamash and Abu Ma'qasib clans in Deir al-Balah began operating in the first half of 2025, with most of their activity focused on seizing aid trucks and transferring them to areas east of Deir al-Balah under IDF control. According to reports, the looted aid was later sold on the black market at exorbitant prices (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 17, 2025).