A year since the Hamas takeover of Gaza

16 Jun 2008

A year has passed since the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip from the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in mid-June 2007.

Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, neutralized the military and political strength of Fatah and the Palestinian security services and established a radical Islamic entity in the Gaza Strip.

In June 2007 Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, neutralized the military and political strength of Fatah and the Palestinian security services and established a radical Islamic entity in the Gaza Strip which is separate from the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank headed by Fatah and President Mahmoud Abbas. That fundamental change in the status of Hamas, which turned it into an administration responsible for the lives of the Gaza Strip’s 1,400,000 residents, also influenced its terrorist attack policy.

In view of the changes, Hamas was forced to provide a response to the tension between the political exigencies and its dedication to the path of terrorism employed to realize its strategic and political goals. The response to the dilemma was to continue its terrorist campaign, especially from the Gaza Strip, while regulating the dosage in a way that would enable it to undertake a controlled escalation of rocket fire without provoking Israel into a broad military action in the Gaza Strip.

The West has long recognized that Hamas is a dangerous terrorist group. Not only the United States, but also the European Union, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and Japan have officially listed Hamas as a terrorist organization.

Increasingly, pragmatic elements in the Middle East are starting to acknowledge the threat posed by this organization. One expression of this growing awareness can be found in the mainstream Arabic-language newspapers, which are printing ever more articles and editorials that are
unsympathetic towards Hamas. Arab public opinion is starting to become conscious of the fact that Hamas is harmful to many basic interests of the Palestinian people.

**Hamas exploitation of Palestinian population and children**

Hamas, as a basic element of its strategy, exploits the Palestinian population as shields for its terrorist operations and infrastructure by:

- The deliberate launching of rockets from populated areas
- The deliberate use of civilian homes to shield Hamas arms and explosives manufacturing facilities
- The deliberate use of civilians as human shields against anticipated airstrikes

![Explosive device found in Gaza mosque](https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Terrorism/Pages/A%20year%20since%20the%20Hamas%20takeover%20of%20Gaza%20-%20June%202008.aspx)

Palestinian children in Hamas-controlled Gaza are being taught to take an active role in terrorist operations against Israel and are thus placed in mortal danger by those who should be responsible for their safety and well-being. The children, too young to fully understand even the meaning of death, are taught to aspire to "martyrdom" in children's television shows produced by the Hamas.

Instead of being told to keep away from Kassam rocket launchers, Palestinian children's lives are deliberately endangered by the Hamas-supported rocket teams which have been known to send young children to retrieve launchers after the rockets are fired. The terror organizations make cynical use of children, knowing well that Israeli counter-terrorist strikes will target these specific locations in order to prevent further rocket fire. Even worse, the terrorist groups operating in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip have recruited children to become armed participants, and even human bombs, in their terrorist operations against Israelis.

**Incitement and attacks against Christians in Gaza**

Since Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in June 2007 incitement and attacks against Christian institutions and those identified as Western have increased, and have included churches, Christian and UN schools, the American International School, libraries, Internet cafes, etc. Recent incidents were the detonation of bombs in Gaza City near a school run by nuns and at the entrance to a fast-food restaurant.
Hamas, as the ruling regime in the Gaza Strip, has not taken effective steps to put an end to the attacks, which have continued into 2008. On the contrary, the Hamas movement has stepped up its efforts to impose an Islamic social code on the local population. There are approximately 3,500 Christians living in the Gaza Strip, mainly in Gaza City, mostly professionals and businessmen. The tiny Christian minority under the Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip lives in daily fear and prefers to tone down its holidays and religious and cultural activities, while some of them even consider leaving the Gaza Strip.

The Hamas terror war against Israel

Since the Hamas takeover in June 2007, over 3,000 rockets and mortar bombs fired from the Gaza Strip have struck southwestern Israel - Sderot, Ashkelon, Netivot, and many of the rural communities in the area.

Among the targets: homes in Sderot and throughout the western Negev, a shopping mall in Ashkelon, Sapir College in Sderot, an IDF basic training camp, children playing outside school and near their homes, field and factory workers. Four civilians have been killed by rocket or mortar fire, dozens injured (including an eight-year-old boy whose leg was amputated), and thousands are suffering from trauma and severe emotional stress. The attacks have caused extensive damage to private homes, factories and infrastructures.
While rocket and mortar shell fire claims less lives than suicide bombing attacks, it has a devastating effect on the daily life and sense of security of the 200,000 residents of the western Negev. The damage done by rockets to the civilian population of Sderot and other western Negev population centers cannot be measured only statistically in terms of dead and wounded. Studies done in recent years show that the continued rocket fire and the large number of shock victims have led to post traumatic stress disorder among many of Sderot's residents (close to 30%). It influences their mental health and seriously damages the quality of their lives.

Due to continued terrorist attacks emanating from Gaza and targeting the Israeli civilian population, the Israeli Security Cabinet in September 2007 designated the Gaza Strip as a "hostile territory".

**Israel provides fuel and humanitarian supplies; Hamas attacks crossings**

Since its total withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in August-September 2005, Israel is not legally obligated to provide the Gaza Strip with all of its needs. However, Israel is committed to averting any humanitarian crisis and continues to supply fuel, food, medical supplies and other humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip, despite repeated Hamas attacks precisely on those crossings Israel must use to transfer the supplies - Nahal Oz, Karni, Kerem Shalom and Erez.
These attacks have forced the periodic closure of these crossings and the interruption in the supply of fuel and goods to the people of Gaza. It is apparent that Hamas targets the crossings in order to prevent the transfer of humanitarian aid to the civilian population, thus cynically depriving its own population and causing an artificial humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and encouraging international pressure on Israel.

**Hamas military buildup**

Hamas places great significance on artillery (rockets and mortars), antitank weapons, and explosive devices to be used against the IDF, and is involved in a massive military build-up. Hamas’s rocket supply includes locally-produced Kassam rockets, with ranges of 9-13 km (6-8 miles), and hundreds of mortar bombs, locally produced as well as standard ones that are smuggled in. The Hamas military wing has independently-produced long-range rockets which can reach 19 km (almost 12 miles) as well as dozens of standard long-range Grad rockets (122mm), with a range of up to 20.4 km (12 ½ miles), bringing the city of Ashkelon within range of their attacks. With their constantly increasing artillery power, Hamas and other terrorist organizations have brought a quarter of a million people living in peaceful agricultural communities, small towns and even cities within their range.

The arms and ammunition in the Gaza Strip are obtained from three major sources:
- provided by Iran and Syria, either directly or through Hizbullah, and smuggled into the Gaza Strip via tunnels connecting Rafah to Sinai and along the Philadelphi route;
- acquired from arms dealers;
- independently produced in facilities situated in the heart of civilian areas, which exposes the local residents to risks due to "work accidents" and attacks by Israel.

According to a report issued by the Israel Security Agency, between the takeover in June 2007 and early 2008, Hamas smuggled at least 80 tons of explosives into the Gaza Strip. Smuggling of raw materials used in the manufacture of rockets and explosives is also conducted through border crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip under cover of delivering commercial or humanitarian equipment. In addition, Hamas obtained large quantities of weapons after it took over the security services of the Palestinian Authority in June 2007 and during the breach of Rafah Crossing to Egypt in January 2008.
Iran provides assistance to Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist organizations in the form of weapons, technological assistance to their weapons-manufacturing industry, and advanced training of terrorist operatives in special camps in Iran; operatives are also sent for training to Syria and Lebanon. The funds necessary for the purchase of weapons are introduced into the Gaza Strip in covert ways, mostly through money changers and traders in the Arab world. Terrorist organizations also make extensive use of the tunnels to smuggle large sums of money, up to tens of millions of dollars on each run.

In 2007, Hamas undertook the most extensive and significant training effort in the history of its military wing to increase the military professional skills of terror operatives from all levels and in all occupations. Hamas has a core of several hundred highly-trained operatives who have undergone basic and advanced military training, specializing in such fields as anti-tank weapons, small arms, machineguns, sabotage, etc. Following the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, as part of the acceleration of its military buildup, Hamas operatives were sent to training courses in Iran and Syria. They were smuggled back into the Gaza Strip and transferred the know-how and skills they had acquired to operatives belonging to Hamas’s operative wing and internal security services.

**Conclusions**

There are several indications that Hamas is not interested in peace between Israel and the Palestinians, or even in reaching an interim arrangement that could lead to eventual peaceful coexistence.

- Hamas continues to attack innocent civilians in Israel. These attacks have only increased since Israel’s disengagement from the Gaza Strip in August-September 2005 and the removal of all Israeli civilians and military forces from the area.

- Hamas purposefully positions its weapons and explosives workshops and launching sites within civilian neighborhoods and institutions such as schools. Hamas knows that it is doubly endangering its own civilian population - first, through the risk of “work accidents” and second, through the likelihood that any IDF counterterrorist operation will cause damage and death to civilians, thus providing Hamas with excellent, graphic propaganda in the world media.

- Hamas further endangers its own civilian population by encouraging them to act as human shields against IDF counterterrorist operations, and by recruiting young children to participate in dangerous operations. (Ironically, by its own actions, Hamas demonstrates to the world its assumption that Israeli forces indeed take extreme caution when civilians are in the line of fire.)

- Hamas targets the very crossing points where fuel, food, medicines and other humanitarian aid is transferred from Israel into the Gaza Strip. Hamas knows that attacking the crossing points disrupts the flow of humanitarian aid to the civilian population, and it does so in order to exploit the suffering of its own population for propaganda purposes.

[https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Terrorism/Pages/A%20year%20since%20the%20Hamas%20takeover%20of%20Gaza-%20June%202008.aspx](https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Terrorism/Pages/A%20year%20since%20the%20Hamas%20takeover%20of%20Gaza-%20June%202008.aspx)
• Hamas diverts fuel and other supplies to its clandestine arms industry and private storehouses, rather than giving priority to the power plant, hospitals and other civilian facilities. Hamas knows that it is Israel that will be censured for any shortages in humanitarian supplies.

• Hamas leaders and spokesmen constantly reiterate their support for the "resistance" (code name for terrorism) against Israel. They have also announced that their goal is to "liberate" Palestine from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, leaving no room for Jews. They specifically mention Jerusalem - the ancient and modern capital of Israel - as one of the places to be "liberated."

• The very fact that Hamas carried out a violent coup against the more pragmatic Palestinian Authority, led by Abu Mazen, proves that they are not willing to participate in the process of achieving peace through compromise between Israel and the Palestinian Authority that was started in 1993 with the Oslo Accords.