

# FDD FAQ

FDD Frequently  
Asked Questions

## Hamas

Joe Truzman and Toby Dershowitz | May 26, 2021

Joe Truzman is a research analyst at FDD's *Long War Journal* and a contributor to FDD's Center on Military and Political Power. Toby Dershowitz is senior vice president for government relations and strategy at FDD.

Q

### What is Hamas?

A

Hamas is an armed Palestinian movement [created](#) in 1987 as a violent splinter faction of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood. The group became a powerful rival to the Palestine Liberation Organization, which for decades had been the dominant armed Palestinian organization. [Hamas has conducted](#) numerous attacks against Israelis, including suicide bombings, rocket launches, improvised explosive device attacks, and shootings. As of September 21, 2020, attacks by Hamas had killed [approximately](#) 25 U.S. citizens. In 2014, Hamas kidnapped and murdered 16-year-old Naftali Fraenkel, who had dual American and Israeli citizenship.

Hamas' [charter](#), published in 1988, describes the organization as an Islamist movement. "Israel will rise and will remain erect until Islam eliminates it as it had eliminated its predecessors," the charter states.

In 2017, Hamas, known in Arabic as Harakat Muqawama al-Islamiya, [released](#) a policy document, which did not replace or supersede its charter, as part of a failed attempt to portray the organization as less radical. The new document, however, changed little from the 1988 charter: It still calls for the destruction of Israel. Referring to Israel's borders, the charter says, "Hamas rejects any alternative to the full and complete liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea." Hamas upholds "armed resistance" as the only way to liberate Palestine. In Article 13 of the charter, Hamas states that negotiations are a "contradiction to the principles of the Islamic Resistance Movement. Abusing any part of Palestine is abuse directed against [Islam]." This poses a challenge to those wishing to include Hamas in negotiations to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Q

### Who leads Hamas?

A

Hamas' founder, [Sheikh Ahmed Yassin](#), was a Palestinian cleric and the organization's spiritual leader. Israel assassinated him in 2004. [Ismail Haniyeh](#) is the current leader of Hamas' political wing. Yahya Sinwar is Hamas' [leader](#) in Gaza. Sinwar is [best known](#) for his role in founding the military wing of Hamas, formally known as the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, and Majd, an internal security apparatus created to hunt down those who are in contact with Israel in the Gaza Strip.

[Mohammad Deif](#) is the commander of al-Qassam Brigades. On May 10, 2021, as another conflict between Israel and Hamas began, Deif issued an ultimatum demanding that Israeli authorities release prisoners arrested in Jerusalem and withdraw Israeli security forces from al-Aqsa Mosque. The security forces were on the Temple Mount, also known as Haram al-Sharif, to prevent extremists from lobbing Molotov cocktails and rocks at Jews praying at the Western Wall. Deif likely knew that Israel would not accept the ultimatum, thus giving him an excuse to launch rockets toward Jerusalem later that day.

Q

## What triggered recent conflicts between Hamas and Israel?

A

During most of 2018 and 2019, Hamas coordinated a series of attacks at the Israel-Gaza border, under the guise of civilian protests. The Hamas campaign was called the “[March of Return](#)” and entailed riots by thousands of Palestinians at the security fence between Israel and Gaza. At the onset of the march, Sinwar [proclaimed](#) that militants would “take down the border” with Israel and “tear out [Israeli] hearts from their bodies.” The riots spurred several bouts of rocket attacks and Israeli retaliation in [2018](#) and [2019](#).

One of the causes of the May 2021 conflict was the [cancellation](#) of Palestinian elections by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas when it became clear that Hamas would likely defeat him. Hamas had [warned](#) that it would hold Israel responsible if Abbas canceled the elections, even though it was Abbas, not Israel, who canceled them.

Subsequently, Hamas-led terror groups fired almost 4,400 missiles and rockets into Israel, putting at risk 70 percent of Israel’s population. Approximately 30 percent of the rockets Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad fired from Gaza landed inside Gaza itself, killing up to 50 Palestinians. After the May conflict, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) [stated](#) they had neutralized over 1,500 terror targets in Gaza, killed over 200 terrorists, and had destroyed over 60 miles of tunnels that Hamas had created to enable a Hamas commando war with Israeli ground troops.

Q

## Where does Hamas get its funding?

A

Hamas used the 2018 conflict to pressure Israel to allow [funds from Qatar](#) to enter the Gaza Strip. In 2019, Qatar [provided](#) more than \$150 million to Hamas. A year later, Qatar said it would provide [\\$100 million](#) in funds, and Doha pledged an additional [\\$360 million](#) in 2021.

Hamas also receives funds from [Iran](#), its chief supporter in the region. The group has praised Tehran publicly for its financial and military support. In 2018, Sinwar [commended](#) Iran for the “large amounts of cash, equipment and [military] expertise” Hamas received from the Islamic Republic. In 2019, Sinwar [thanked](#) Iran for providing Hamas with long-range rockets to strike Israel. After the May 2021 conflict, Haniyeh [thanked Iran](#) for its financial, military, and technological support. The exact amount of assistance Iran provides is unclear from open sources.

In [2019](#), al-Qassam Brigades started a Bitcoin fundraising campaign on its website. In August 2020, the U.S. government [seized](#) millions of dollars in Bitcoin from terrorist groups, including al-Qassam Brigades. However, al-Qassam Brigades continues to publish information on how to donate Bitcoin via its website.

Q

## Does the U.S. regard Hamas as a terrorist entity?

A

In October [1997](#), the U.S. Department of State listed Hamas as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), freezing the group's assets held in U.S. financial institutions, barring Hamas members from entering the United States, and banning the provision of "material support or resources" to Hamas. In [2003](#), the United States designated five Hamas-related charities and six senior Hamas members as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs). Additionally, in [2013](#), the U.S. government blocked over \$1 million in funds held in the United States related to Hamas activity. American citizens have brought numerous civil suits against Hamas over the years.

Pursuant to [Executive Order 12947](#) of January 23, 1995, the United States designated Hamas as a terrorist organization, prohibiting U.S. persons, including charitable donations, from "making or receiving ... any contribution of funds, goods, or services" to or from Hamas. That same day, Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) [listed](#) Shaykh Ahmad Yasin (a.k.a. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin) as a Specially Designated Terrorist (SDT) under Executive Order 12947.

Later that year, on August 29, 1995, OFAC [added](#) Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzook (a.k.a. Musa Au Marzuk) to the SDT list under Executive Order 12947, prohibiting "any [financial] transaction or dealing" between U.S. persons, including charities, and Marzook.

It was not until October 8, 1997, that the U.S. State Department [designated](#) Hamas as an FTO, under criteria outlined in Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). This move requires "U.S. financial institutions possessing or controlling any assets of [Hamas] to block all transactions involving those assets," bars Hamas "[r]epresentatives and members" from entering the United States, and prohibits the witting provision of "material support or resources" to Hamas.

On August 22, 2003, [Treasury](#) designated [Khalid Mishaal](#) (a.k.a. Khaled Meshaal) as an SDGT under Executive Order 13224, thereby "freezing any assets" he had in the United States "and prohibiting transactions [between] U.S. nationals" and Mishaal.

On March 18, 2010, Treasury [designated](#) Al-Aqsa Television, a Gaza-based TV station "financed and controlled by Hamas," pursuant to Executive Order 13224. Treasury called Al-Aqsa Television "a primary Hamas media outlet and airs programs and music videos designed to recruit children to become Hamas armed fighters and suicide bombers upon reaching adulthood." Also, in June 2010, the European Commission [approved](#) France-based Eutelsat's decision to pull Al-Aqsa Television after France's electronic-media regulator found the channel was inciting hatred in contravention of the law.

In 2015, Treasury [sanctioned](#) several entities for supporting Hamas, including Hamas leader Saleh al-Arouri, "who funds and directs military operations in the West Bank and against Israel," according to a Treasury statement.

On January 31, 2018, the State and Treasury departments [added](#) Ismail Haniyeh to the list of individuals and entities designated as SDGTs under Executive Order 13224.

In 2019, [Treasury](#) sanctioned Hamas-linked financial operatives for "funnel[ing] tens of millions of dollars from Iran's Qods Force through Hizballah in Lebanon to [Hamas] for terrorist attacks originating from the Gaza Strip," according to a Treasury statement.

Q

## Have other governments designated hamas as a terrorist organization?

A

On June 22, 1989, Israel [listed](#) Hamas as a terrorist organization along with Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Additionally, on March 6, 2019, Israel [designated](#) the Gaza-based, Hamas-controlled Al-Aqsa TV station as a terrorist entity.

As a [report](#) by the Counter Extremism Project (CEP) has documented, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and other governments have designated Hamas and its “military wing” as terrorist entities. In March 2001, the United Kingdom [designated](#) al-Qassam Brigades under the Terrorism Act 2000.

On November 27, 2002, Canada also [designated](#) Hamas as a terrorist organization. Additionally, on September 11, 2013, 15 EU member states froze the group’s assets.

Australia [listed](#) al-Qassam Brigades as a terrorist organization on November 9, 2003. As CEP notes, a little over two years later, on December 21, 2005, the European Union “[froze](#) Hamas’ European assets under Article 2(3) of Regulation (EC) No. 2580/2001.”

Furthermore, on October 11, 2010, New Zealand [designated](#) al-Qassam Brigades under the Terrorism Suppression Act of 2002, “which freezes the assets of terrorist entities and makes it a criminal offense to participate in or support the activities of the designated terrorist entity,” according to CEP.

Q

## How has hamas used human shields?

A

Hamas’ extensive use of [human shields](#) in recent years is [well-documented](#). During the May 2021 conflict, Hamas reportedly [hid](#) a terror tunnel under a school, [used](#) civilian apartment buildings for military planning and operations, and [built](#) weapons factories in the heart of densely populated civilian areas. Israel sent a [letter](#) to the United Nations detailing the use of human shields by Hamas during the 2014 war. The United Nations has [called](#) on Hamas to “cease immediately” these violations of the laws of war.

Sinwar has stated plainly that Hamas has a deliberate policy of using Palestinian civilians as human shields. In 2018, Sinwar [said](#) Hamas had “decided to turn that which is most dear to us – the bodies of our women and children – into ... a dam to prevent the racing of many Arabs towards the normalization of ties with” Israel. Sinwar further boasted that the plan worked, as “our people have imposed their agenda upon the whole world,” forcing onto “the world’s television screens ... the sacrifice of [Palestinian] children as an offering for Jerusalem.”

Q

## What is the relationship between Hamas and Fatah?

A

Hamas and Fatah are the dominant parties in Palestinian politics. Fatah is based in the West Bank, and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Both political parties strive to be the official representative of the Palestinian people. For years, both groups have [attempted](#) to reconcile their differences and hold elections but have not succeeded.

Hamas has suppressed Fatah supporters by [arresting](#) them in an attempt to maintain power in the Gaza Strip. Similarly, Fatah has [arrested](#) Hamas members and activists. In the aftermath of the May 2021 conflict between Hamas and Israel, the United States pledged to provide humanitarian aid to help the Palestinians in Gaza. Some of this aid will be channeled through the Palestinian Authority (PA). However, in light of the rift between PA President Abbas and Hamas, questions remain about how the aid will reach Palestinians in Gaza without benefiting Hamas. PA financial support for a variety of terrorism-related activities can also complicate the aid process.

Q

## What is President Biden's policy toward Hamas?

A

President Joe Biden's position on Hamas has been consistent, maintaining that Israel is entitled to defend its population from the terrorist group. In 2009, he [said](#), "In the near term, we must consolidate the cease-fire in Gaza by working with Egypt and others to stop smuggling, and developing an international relief and reconstruction effort that strengthens the Palestinian Authority, and not Hamas. Neither of these goals can be accomplished without close collaboration among the United States, Europe, and our Arab partners."

In May 2021, Biden [underscored](#) the same point: "The United States fully supports Israel's right to defend itself against indiscriminate rocket attacks from Hamas and other Gaza-based terrorist groups that have taken the lives of innocent civilians in Israel... The United States is committed to working with the United Nations and other international stakeholders to provide rapid humanitarian assistance and to marshal international support for the people of Gaza and reconstruction efforts. We will do this in full partnership with the Palestinian Authority – not Hamas, the Authority – in a manner that does not permit Hamas to simply restock its military arsenal."

Biden subsequently announced that the United States would [grant](#) Israel additional funding to replenish its Iron Dome air defense system. The system had a 90 percent interception rate during Hamas' May 2021 war against Israel, saving many Israeli lives – Arab and Jew.