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Israel Security Agency - Terrorism Portal

Organizational Glossary

Hamas – The Islamic Resistance Movement

Hamas, whose name means “the Islamic resistance movement,” is a Sunni fundamentalist Islamic body, which strives to establish a Palestinian state founded on Islamic law in place of the state of Israel. Hamas was established by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin from the Gaza Strip, and became active in the “territories” in December 1987 (with the beginning of the first intifada). Hamas defines itself, according to its charter published in August 1988, as the Palestinian branch of the Islamic Brotherhood movement. Hamas strongly opposes recognition of Israel and talks with Israel, and sanctifies “Jihad” (holy war) as the sole method of action to solve the “Palestinian problem.” According to the Hamas charter, the commandment of jihad is an individual religious obligation applying to each and every Muslim. The Hamas military wing, called the “Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades,” is a terrorist organization which is an integral part of the movement. This body is funded by Hamas finance, part of which come from charitable contributions (one of the basic commandments of Islam), and enjoys Hamas’ popularity, attained by the “da’wa” infrastructure built by Hamas. The da’wa infrastructure includes a wide network of charitable organizations which provide financial support, religious and educational services, and religious indoctrination (in Hamas terms, “preparation of the hearts”). This infrastructure is used by Hamas to pinpoint and cultivate activists and supporters from a young age. In the parliamentary elections carried out in the Palestinian Authority in January 2006, Hamas won a large majority in the Legislative Council, and replaced Fatah as the ruling party. Ismail Hanniyeh, a senior Hamas official in the Gaza Strip, was appointed prime minister, and the movement sought to establish its status within the leadership of the Palestinian Authority. In this context, Hamas established an operational force, which took by force the security responsibilities in the Gaza Strip from the official Palestinian security apparatuses, identified with Fatah. Following a number of violent encounters between members of the two movements, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip (June 2007), ousted the Fatah members from their positions, and became the sole governmental authority in the Strip. Under Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip, rocket fire into Israel increased, as well as the efforts to smuggle weapons into the Strip, and to upgrade Hamas’s operational capabilities. All of this was in preparation for future confrontation with Israel.

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