

Terrorist Threats from the Palestinian Territories (Gaza)

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Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

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Recent events in the Palestinian territories, specifically the Gaza strip, make assessing the terrorist threats in Gaza a topic of importance from a counterterrorism and geopolitical perspective. The tremendous imbalance in civilian casualties judging from open sources such as Al-Jazeera English and other organizations casts Israel in a negative light and makes the situation appear *prima facie* as one of unjustified Israeli aggression and ruthless bombardment of civilians including children. The situation on the ground, however, is undoubtedly far more complex. Judging from the fact that Israel has one of the most advanced military and intelligence apparatuses in the world and is well aware of the malignment from major news outlets and civilian social movements, it is right to conjecture that they are fully aware of the threats of collateral damage including the unintentional killing of Palestinian children, who deserve full protection as innocent non-combatants from a human rights and moral/ethical perspective. By extension, if we grant that Israeli operatives and military personnel are aware of this risk, it is logical to assume that *the terrorist threat stemming from Gaza is profound enough for Israel to take this military-strategic risk from a cost-benefit perspective.*

A Summary of Recent Events in the Palestinian territories (Gaza)¹

By the night of May 17 local time, Israeli military forces had been launching strikes towards Gaza, resulting in 192 casualties, among them noncombatants and civilians, including 58 children and 34 women. Hamas was also launching rocket strikes at Israel, resulting in civilian casualties with noncombatants killed including children on the Israeli side. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu indicated that the Israeli response would be protracted and aggressive against Hamas, and would make Hamas pay a steep price for their aggression against Israeli civilians. Approximately 34,000 Palestinians have been displaced. China, Norway, and Tunisia attempted to declare a Security Council statement, which would call for the cessation of tensions and aggression. They were prevented by the U.S., precluding the effort, leading China to make negative declarations about the U.S. In parallel, Egypt, Qatar, and Jordan are trying to broker a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas. For context, an Egyptian call for an immediate cease-fire with a duration of one year was accepted by Hamas but rejected by Israel. Israel's security cabinet downvoted a cease-fire on Sunday, although violence means a ceasefire is more likely. Sources indicate that Israel demands that Hamas cease hostilities two days before it does, while Hamas only is in favor of a simultaneous cease-fire. The Egyptians back Hamas on this.

An Overview of Hamas and Summary of Terror Against Israel

Hamas or in the Arabic: حماس, which is an acronym of حركة المقاومة الإسلامية transliterated as Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-ʿIslāmiyyah, or in English the acronym for "Islamic Resistance Movement") is a Palestinian Sunni-Islamic fundamentalist militant group² and nationalist organization. It has a conjoined social and military wing, Dawah and Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades respectively. It won the

¹ Information in this section drawn from Mirette F. Mabrouk's piece for Middle East Institute titled *The situation in Gaza threatens to list dangerously out of control.*

² Kear 2018, p. 22.

2006 election and became the de facto governing authority of the Gaza Strip after the 2007 Battle of Gaza.³ Israel and Hamas have since been in conflict, with the duration and intensity of periods of strife varying. Canada, the European Union, Israel, Japan and the United States designate Hamas as a terrorist organization. Australia, New Zealand, Paraguay and the United Kingdom say only the military wing should be viewed as a terrorist organization. China, Iran, Qatar, and Russia do not designate Hamas as a terrorist organization. Hamas was founded in 1987 after the First Intifada, as an affiliate of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.⁴ Sheik Ahmed Yassin, a cofounder of the group, said in 1987 and affirmed in the Hamas charter that the group was established to push for the liberation of Palestine, including modern-day Israel, from Israeli occupation and to establish an Islamic state in present day Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip.⁵ Hamas has carried out attacks against Israeli civilians and soldiers which they describe as retaliation against assassinations of leadership.⁶

Hamas uses tactics including but not limited to suicide bombings and rocket attacks⁷ that have struck cities like Tel Aviv and Haifa.⁸ In the January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections, Hamas won a majority in the Palestinian Parliament,⁹ defeating the Fatah party whom are affiliated with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Since September 2015, Israel has been beset by a wave of terrorist attacks perpetrated by individuals, many of them young and inspired by incitement stemming from radical, Islamist, and antisemitic factions of the Palestinian leadership. On 30 March 2018, Hamas instigated a campaign that was described by some as a peaceful civilian protest, but was in practice a justification for violent riots on the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip. In addition to this, kites and helium balloons with incendiary material attached have been launched from the Gaza Strip to the Israeli side causing fires. The resulting fires which number over 2,000 have decimated thousands of acres of forests and agricultural land, for a sum total 8,747 acres as of July 2019.¹⁰ This came at a tremendous cost to farmers and to the ecosystem of the western Negev. Experts conjecture in their estimates that it will take decades, perhaps more, for the area to recover. Simultaneously, rocket launches from the Gaza Strip have also increased. In May 2019, Hamas and Israel agreed to a six-month ceasefire. The number of attacks has diminished but has not ceased completely.¹¹

Conclusion

The tragedy of innocent deaths of Palestinians including women and children cannot be observed in isolation. One must consider the fact the virulently anti-Semitic terrorist groups are extant in Gaza and plan attacks on Israel that only the deepest sources in Israeli intelligence are cognizant of. The classified nature of most critical intelligence information, coupled with justified clandestine preservation of counterterrorist information, means that Israel will always come out maligned and

³ Davis 2016, pp. 67–69. Mukhimer 2012, pp. vii, 58.

⁴ Milton-Edwards 2015, p. 93.

⁵ Zweiri 2006, p. 683.

⁶ Atkins 2004, p. 123.

⁷ Cordesman, Anthony H. (2006). *Arab-Israeli Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars*. Greenwood Publishing Group/Center for Strategic and International Studies. ISBN 978-0-275-99186-9.

⁸ Bregman, Ahron (2016). *Israel's Wars: A History Since 1947* (4 ed.). Routledge. ISBN 978-1-317-29638-6.

⁹ Hueston, Harry Raymond; Pierpaoli, Paul G.; Zahar, Sherifa (2014). "Hamas". In Roberts, Priscilla (ed.). *Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Essential Reference Guide*. ABC-CLIO. pp. 67–71. ISBN 978-1-610-69068-3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

demonized for the tragic deaths of Palestinian non-combatants. The objective observer also must take into consideration the imbalance in power and military-intelligence competence between the Israelis and their enemies in Gaza including but not limited to Hamas and other Iranian-backed militia proxies. If these hostile actors had the Israeli military and intelligence competence, there is little doubt that we would see tremendous casualties of innocent non-combatants from the Israeli side. From the perspective of civilian counterterrorism analysts and observers, we must admit humility to how much we do not know about the situation in Gaza due to the clandestine nature of much of the information. For some semblance of a genuine ceasefire to ever be achieved in the Palestinian territories, bad actors like Hamas must be delegitimized, and harmful narratives by biased media must be counterbalanced with careful counterterrorism analysis and objective, unbiased research into threats and their implications.

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