

1. What is Hamas?

Hamas is an Iranian-backed Palestinian terrorist organization that controls the Gaza Strip. Hamas' 1988 [charter](#) states: "Hamas rejects any alternative to the full and complete liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea" — i.e., the annihilation of Israel. The charter says: "The Day of Judgment will not come about until Muslims fight Jews and kill them." Hamas later issued a new policy document, which did not replace or supersede its original charter, that included more coded language with calls for "resisting the occupation with all means and methods."

In October 2023, Hamas carried out the worst terror attack in Israel's history resulting in more than 1,300 dead and many more wounded. Hamas was previously responsible for the deaths of over 2,000 Israelis through suicide bombings and other attacks. Hamas violence derailed the Oslo Peace Process between Israel and the PLO during the 1990s.

Since conquering the Gaza Strip by force in 2007, Hamas has maintained a standing army of fighters and an [arsenal](#) of light arms, mortars, rockets, shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles, drones, and more.

2. Why does Hamas control Gaza?

Israel took control of the Gaza Strip after the Six-Day War in 1967. In 2005, under U.S. pressure, then Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon unilaterally withdrew from the coastal enclave, removing every Israeli town, including every citizen, soldier, and grave.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) ruled Gaza for two years, until 2007, when Hamas waged a brief but violent war against the PA. Since then, Hamas and other terrorist groups have launched thousands of rockets and mortars toward Israel, used Palestinian civilians as human shields to protect their personnel and facilities, and terrorized the Israeli communities near Gaza.

3. Is Hamas a designated terrorist entity?

The United States designated Hamas as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997, freezing its U.S.-based assets, barring members from entering the country, and banning the provision of "material support or resources."

The U.S. government subsequently sanctioned Hamas-related charities and senior Hamas members and blocked funds related to Hamas activity. Israel, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and 15 European states have also sanctioned some or all of Hamas.

4. Who are the leaders of Hamas?

Hamas leaders are dispersed across Iran, Qatar, Turkey, Gaza, and Lebanon, among others. Leaders include:



[Ismail Haniyeh](#), chief of the political bureau based in Qatar



[Yahya Sinwar](#), leader of Hamas in Gaza



[Saleh al-Arouri](#), deputy political chief who splits his time between Qatar, Iran, Turkey, and Lebanon



[Mohammad Deif](#), commander of Hamas' al-Qassam Brigades presumed to be in Gaza



[Khaled Mashal](#), former leader of Hamas based in Qatar, recently called for global "Day of Jihad"



[Khaled Qaddoumi](#), Hamas representative to the Islamic Republic of Iran

5. How does Hamas get its funding and weapons?

Iran reportedly [supplies](#) \$100 million in financial and military support annually. Hamas officials praise Iran for sending “cash, equipment and [military] expertise” and long-range rockets to strike Israel.

Qatar reportedly contributed more than \$150 million to Hamas in 2019, \$100 million in 2020, and \$360 million in 2021. Qatar now funds Hamas with an estimated [\\$120 million](#) per year. It claims to support the Gaza government, not the terrorists.

Turkey, Malaysia, Algeria and Kuwait also provide financial, military, diplomatic, and political support to Hamas.

6. What is the relationship between Hamas, Fatah, and the Palestinian Authority in Gaza?

Hamas and Fatah are the dominant players in Palestinian politics. Fatah is based in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Both seek to lead the Palestinian people. For years, they have failed to reconcile their differences and hold elections.

Fatah is the party that controls the PA, which was created in 1994 to be the government of the West Bank and Gaza. However, when Hamas seized power in 2007, it violently ejected Fatah and the PA from Gaza.

7. How does Hamas treat Palestinians?

Hamas [diverts](#) international assistance to build its terrorist infrastructure. This impedes economic development and contributes to the humanitarian and environmental crisis in Gaza. The group restricts the rights of women and Christians and treats homosexuality as a crime.

Hamas uses civilians as human shields, hiding terror tunnels, weapons factories, and operations centers under schools and in densely populated civilian areas. The United Nations (UN) has [called](#) on Hamas to “cease immediately” these violations of international law.

8. Has Hamas attacked Israel in other instances prior to 2023?

Since it seized power in Gaza in 2007, Hamas has provoked multiple major confrontations with Israel, including a 22-day war in 2008-2009; an eight-day war in 2012; a 50-day war in 2014; a series of coordinated attacks in 2018 and 2019; and an 11-day war in May 2021.

Prior to October 2023, Hamas had killed [approximately](#) 25 U.S. citizens and was holding two hostages plus the bodies of two Israeli soldiers. Hamas’ 2023 attack represents the most lethal terrorist attack in Israel’s history. The Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, claimed the lives of [22](#) citizens from the United States, 17 from Britain, 18 from Thailand, 10 from Nepal, 10 from France, seven from Argentina, and others.

9. How does the October 2023 massacre reflect Iran’s “ring of fire” strategy?

The plot to attack Israel is part of an Iranian strategy to encircle Israel with armed groups, instigate turmoil, and carry out acts of terror. *The Wall Street Journal* [revealed](#) that the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) helped plan and execute the massacre. U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said Iran’s support for Hamas makes it “complicit” in the October 7 attack.

10. What can the United States do to support the dismantling of Hamas?

Give Israel Time and Space: The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) needs time and international support to defeat Hamas. Washington is best positioned to do this at the UN and in the public sphere.

Sanction Human Shields Enablers: An existing U.S. law — the Sanctioning the Use of Civilians as Defenseless Shields (SHIELDS) Act — passed unanimously by Congress requires the president to impose sanctions on any member of Hamas or Hezbollah that uses human shields. This law’s sanctioning authority must be [extended](#) beyond 2023. There have been no designations so far under this law.

Isolate Hamas: Nominal U.S. allies Turkey and Qatar host Hamas offices and senior leaders. Washington should pressure them to immediately close those offices, expel Hamas officials, and cut support to the group. The United States should shut off funding streams that subsidize Hamas, including certain State Department and USAID grants, and funding of operations in Gaza by UN agencies, especially UNRWA.

Pressure Hamas Supporters to Take in Palestinians Fleeing Gaza: Washington should encourage Egypt to open its border with Gaza to permit Palestinians to enter. This need not be the final destination for refugees. Cairo should call upon the Arab League to determine their ultimate destination. Iran, Hamas’ chief patron, should be called upon to absorb the majority of Gazan refugees. Other Hamas patrons, such as Turkey, Qatar, Malaysia, Algeria and Kuwait, should be called on to take responsibility.

The U.S. Military Must Deter Iranian Escalation: Without a credible U.S. military threat, Tehran may be emboldened to open another front in northern Israel using its terror proxy Hezbollah, making a regional war likely. Iran may also use the opportunity to develop a nuclear weapon. Washington must honor its commitment — commitments from multiple Democratic and Republican presidents — to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons using all instruments of American power.

Deny Iran Resources: Washington must mount an all-of-government effort to target Hamas financial, military, and other networks. This must be coupled with a return to a financial pressure campaign against Iran, Hamas’ main financier. This includes re-imposing Iran sanctions, freezing Iranian access to all of its oil funds abroad, and the targeting of Chinese banks processing Iranian oil transactions.

Snapback UN Sanctions: The UN missile embargo on Iran expires on October 18, 2023. The United States, the United Kingdom, and France each can unilaterally reimpose all UN sanctions against Iran that were suspended as part of the 2015 nuclear deal, including the UN arms embargo that expired in 2019. Congress and the administration should snap back these sanctions immediately.

Broker a Saudi-Israel Peace Deal: Iran’s leaders see the emerging peace deal between Riyadh and Jerusalem as a threat. The deal promises greater stability and prosperity for the region, including for Palestinians. The Biden administration must insist that Riyadh play a constructive role.