

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."

In October 2023, Hamas carried out a massacre 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.

Hamas maintains 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 it. The PA remained in control ever since.

3. Is Hamas a designated terrorist entity?

The United States designated Hamas as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997. It subsequently sanctioned Hamas charities and leaders and blocked funds related to Hamas activity. Israel, the UK, 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.



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



[Yahya Sinwar](#) leads Hamas in Gaza.



[Saleh Al-Aroui](#), deputy political chief, splits his time between Qatar, Iran, Turkey, and Lebanon.



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



[Khaled Mashal](#), former leader of Hamas, is based in Qatar. Khaled Qaddoumi is Hamas representative in Iran.

5. How does Hamas get its funding and weapons?

Iran reportedly [supplies](#) \$100 million in financial and military support to Hamas annually. Qatar has given hundreds of millions of dollars to Hamas, although 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 controls the PA, which was created in 1994 to be the government of the West Bank and Gaza. However, since Hamas seized power in 2007, the PA only controls the West Bank. Both parties seek to lead the Palestinian people. For years, they have failed to reconcile.

7. How does Hamas treat Palestinians?

Hamas [diverts](#) international assistance to build 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 has used civilians as human shields during every round of conflict with Israel.

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

Since overtaking Gaza in 2007, Hamas has provoked several confrontations with Israel, including a 22-day war in 2008-2009; an eight-day war in 2012; a 50-day war in 2014; and an 11-day war in May 2021.

Prior to October 2023, Hamas killed 25 U.S. citizens and was holding two hostages, plus the bodies of two Israeli soldiers. The 10/7 attack killed more than 1,300 people, including [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 10/7 attack 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 was “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 Israeli army 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: A U.S. law — the Sanctioning the Use of Civilians as Defenseless Shields (SHIELDS) Act — requires the president to impose sanctions on any member of Hamas or Hezbollah that uses human shields.

Isolate Hamas: Turkey and Qatar must shutter their Hamas offices and eject the operatives. Washington should also shut off funding streams that subsidize Hamas, including certain State Department and USAID grants, and UN operations in Gaza, especially UNRWA.

Pressure Hamas Supporters to Take in Palestinians Fleeing Gaza: Egypt must now open its border to permit Palestinians to enter. This need not be their final destination. Iran, Hamas’ chief patron, should be called upon to absorb the majority of Gazan refugees. Hamas patrons Turkey, Qatar, Malaysia, Algeria, and Kuwait, should also 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 through Hezbollah. Washington must also honor its commitment to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons using all instruments of its power.

Deny Iran Resources: Washington must target Hamas’ financial, military, and other networks while also targeting Iranian financial resources, as well.

Snapback UN Sanctions: The United States, UK, and France each can unilaterally reimpose UN sanctions against Iran that were suspended as part of the 2015 nuclear deal, including the UN arms embargo that expired in 2020.

Broker a Saudi-Israel Peace Deal: Iran’s leaders see the emerging peace deal between Riyadh and Jerusalem as a threat because it offers greater stability and prosperity for the region, including for Palestinians.