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Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Hamas

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aka the Islamic Resistance Movement; Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya; Izz al-Din al Qassam Battalions; Izz al-Din al Qassam Brigades; Izz al-Din al Qassam Forces; Students of Ayyash; Student of the Engineer; Yahya Ayyash Units; Izz al-Din al-Qassim Brigades; Izz al-Din al-Qassim Forces; Izz al-Din al-Qassim Battalions

Description: Designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization on October 8, 1997, Hamas was established in 1987 at the onset of the first Palestinian uprising, or Intifada, as an outgrowth of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. The armed element, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, has conducted anti-Israeli attacks, including suicide bombings against civilian targets inside Israel. Hamas also manages a broad, mostly Gaza-based, network of "Dawa" or ministry activities that include charities, schools, clinics, youth camps, fundraising, and political activities. After winning Palestinian Legislative Council elections in January 2006, Hamas gained control of significant Palestinian Authority (PA) ministries in Gaza, including the Ministry of Interior. As of 2016, the group retained control of Gaza.

Activities: Prior to 2005, Hamas conducted numerous anti-Israeli attacks, including suicide bombings, rocket launches, improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, and shootings. U.S. citizens have died and been injured in the group's attacks. In June 2007, after Hamas took control of Gaza from the PA and Fatah, the Gaza borders were closed and Hamas increased its use of tunnels to smuggle weapons into Gaza via the Sinai and maritime routes. Hamas has since focused on solidifying its control of Gaza, including hardening its defenses, building weapons caches, tightening security, and conducting limited operations against Israeli military forces.

Hamas fought a 23-day war with Israel from late December 2008 to January 2009. From November 14-21, 2012, Hamas fought another war with Israel during which it claims to have launched more than 1,400 rockets into Israel. Despite the Egypt-mediated ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in 2012, operatives from Hamas and Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ) coordinated and carried out a November bus bombing in Tel Aviv that wounded 29 people. On July 8, 2014, Israel launched Operation Protective Edge in Gaza with the intent of preventing rocket fire into the country; rocket fire had increased following Israeli military operations after Hamas kidnapped and murdered three Israeli teenagers in June 2014, including 16-year-old U.S.-Israeli citizen Naftali Fraenkel. In March 2015, Amnesty International released a report in which it accused Hamas of committing war crimes for launching rockets and mortars into civilian areas in Israel during Operation Protective Edge. In May 2015, Amnesty International published another report declaring Hamas's abduction, torture, and killing of Palestinians during the 2014 Gaza war as further evidence the group had committed war crimes.

In 2016, Hamas continued striking Israel. In April, a Hamas member carried out a suicide attack on a bus in Jerusalem, killing 20. The attack came just two months after Hamas released a music video on its al-Aqsa TV and several social media sites encouraging suicide bombings of Israeli buses. In October, Israeli authorities arrested seven members of a Hamas cell based in the West Bank that was plotting shooting and

kidnapping attacks. The group was also held responsible for several rocket attacks launched from Gaza, including a July strike in Sderot that hit a kindergarten and damaged several neighboring buildings.

Throughout 2016, Hamas cooperated with ISIL-Sinai Province, providing its members with funding, training, and organizational support.

Strength: Several thousand Gaza-based operatives.

Location/Area of Operation: Since 2007, Hamas has controlled Gaza and also has a presence in the West Bank. The group retains leaders and facilitators that conduct political, fundraising, and arms-smuggling activities throughout the region. Hamas also has a presence in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. The group's current leader Khaled Meshaal ruled from exile in Qatar in 2016.

Funding and External Aid: Historically, Hamas has received funding, weapons, and training from Iran. The group also raises funds in the Gulf countries and receives donations from Palestinian expatriates around the world. Hamas also receives donations from its charity organizations. Hamas' supply lines have suffered since the crackdown on smuggling tunnels in the Sinai Peninsula by the Egyptian military.

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