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Country Report on Terrorism 2018 - Chapter 5 - Hamas

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 alQassim Forces; Izz al-Din al-Qassim Battalions.

Description: Designated as a FTO 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. In 2007, Hamas expelled the PA and Fatah from Gaza in a violent takeover. In 2017, the group selected a new leader, Ismail Haniyeh, who is based in Gaza. Hamas remained the de facto ruler in Gaza in 2018.

Activities: Before 2005, Hamas conducted numerous anti-Israeli attacks, including suicide bombings, rocket launches, 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 through the Sinai and maritime routes.

Hamas fought a 23-day war with Israel from late December 2008 to January 2009. From November 14 to 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 cease-fire 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 Israel; the rocket fire from Gaza had increased following earlier Israeli military operations that targeted Hamas for the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers in June 2014, including 16-year-old U.S.-Israeli citizen Naftali Fraenkel.

In April 2016, 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. The group was also held responsible for several Gaza-based rocket attacks, including a July strike in Sderot that hit a kindergarten and damaged several buildings.

Since 2007, Hamas and Fatah have made several attempts to reconcile, though all attempts through the end of 2018 have failed. Hamas-organized protests at the border between Gaza and Israel continued throughout much of 2018, resulting in clashes that killed Hamas members, Palestinian protestors, and Israeli soldiers. Hamas claimed responsibility for numerous rocket attacks from Gaza into Israeli territory throughout 2018.

Strength: Hamas comprises several thousand Gaza-based operatives.

Location/Area of Operation: Since 2007, Hamas has controlled Gaza and has a presence in the West Bank. Hamas also has a presence in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

Funding and External Aid: Historically, Hamas has received funding, weapons, and training from Iran and raises funds in Gulf countries. The group receives donations from Palestinian expatriates as well as from its own charity organizations.