

MOUNTING THREATS TO ISRAEL

HAMAS

Hamas—a designated terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union—poses an immediate, ongoing threat to Israel and its citizens. The group is constructing an enormous infrastructure with which to attack Israeli communities, including a broad network of terror tunnels rebuilt with funds diverted from international humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians. At the same time, six million Israelis are now within range of an estimated 10,000 Hamas rockets.

Hamas is dedicated to Israel's destruction.

Founded in 1987 as an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas (“Islamic Resistance Movement”) rules the Gaza Strip and seeks Israel’s destruction. Since its inception, Hamas has murdered more than 500 Israeli civilians. And since 2007, when the group violently overtook the Gaza Strip, it has provoked three wars with the Jewish state. Hamas has received substantial financing and armaments from Iran. In addition to Hamas, other smaller jihadist militant organizations operate in Gaza, including Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Islamic State (ISIS) affiliates.

Hamas is rapidly rebuilding its attack tunnels.

Hamas is rapidly rebuilding its attack tunnels. During the 2014 war, Israel uncovered and destroyed 32 Hamas tunnels, which penetrated into Israel from Gaza. These tunnels were intended to threaten Israeli communities and kidnap and kill Israelis. Fewer than two years later, an estimated 1,000 Hamas workers are rebuilding the attack tunnel network, diverting materials provided by the international community to rebuild Gaza’s homes and civilian infrastructure. Israeli citizens residing near Gaza report hearing digging sounds beneath their communities.

Hamas is smuggling weapons and dangerous materials into Gaza.

In 2015, Israel prevented nearly 1,000 Hamas smuggling operations to import weapons and other illicit materials into Gaza. The contraband included rocket components, explosives, rocket fuel, drones and banned dual-use items. In addition, scuba diving equipment was confiscated, demonstrating Hamas’ continued investment in naval infiltration operations against Israel. During the 2014 war, four Hamas divers attempting to perpetrate terror attacks reached Israel’s Zikim Beach. Since Operation Protective Edge, according to Israeli military experts, Hamas has doubled the size of its naval commando force.



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Gaza-based terrorists indiscriminately fire missiles at Israeli civilians.

Gaza-based terrorist groups have fired more than 17,000 rockets into Israel since 2001. Israel's Iron Dome rocket defense system has provided significant protection from such attacks, but cannot totally eliminate the threat. In 2014, hundreds of rockets and mortar attacks—including missiles fabricated using Iranian techniques and longer-range Iranian rockets—forced Israel to launch a defensive operation known as Operation Protective Edge. Dozens more rockets have been fired into Israel since hostilities officially ended.

Hamas ignores international law and custom by putting civilians at risk.

During the 2014 war, Hamas indiscriminately targeted Israeli population centers with hundreds of rockets. It also held Gaza's population hostage by using residential neighborhoods as military bunkers—from which it fired rockets—and converting a hospital into its operation center. Hamas exploited Israel's ethical reluctance to fire on civilians by placing noncombatants around military targets. Over the course of the conflict, Hamas ignored or violated at least ten cease-fires negotiated with Israel.

Hamas seeks to destabilize the West Bank, oust the PA.

Hamas' leader in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, praised the recent onset of violence by terrorists from the West Bank and east Jerusalem, and called for an Intifada in the West Bank. Subsequently, Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA)—which rules the West Bank—uncovered West Bank-based Hamas cells preparing violent attacks against Israeli civilians, as well as other actions meant to destabilize the West Bank. During the 2014 summer war, Israel's internal security service thwarted a Hamas coup attempt in the West Bank aimed at overthrowing PA President Mahmoud Abbas and instigating a new round of violence. In addition, Israel and the PA have broken up Hezbollah and other Iranian-sponsored terrorist cells in the West Bank.

THE WAY FORWARD

The United States has long defined Israel's survival and security as important to its national interests. Accordingly, America provides Israel with annual security assistance to help it defend itself, by itself, against mounting threats across the region. Security assistance is currently provided at levels established by 10-year Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between the allies. In 2016, the United States and Israel signed a new 10-year MOU that commits America to providing Israel \$38 billion beginning in 2019, \$5 billion of which will be set aside for joint missile defense. Each year, Congress appropriates security assistance funds for Israel, and AIPAC works with Congress to ensure full funding levels set out in each MOU are met. America must continue to ensure that Israel has the resources needed to respond decisively to threats ranging from Hezbollah to a potentially nuclear armed Iran.



Since 2001, Gaza-based terrorist groups have fired more than 17,000 rockets into Israel, primarily targeting civilians.



New Hamas leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, is widely viewed as an unpredictable hardliner. He spent 22 years in Israeli prisons before being released in the 2011 Gilad Shalit deal.