**Hamas**

Hamas is the Islamic Resistance Movement, a Palestinian Sunni Islamist organization that currently forms the majority party of the Palestinian National Authority.

Created in 1987 by Shaikh Ahmed Yassin of the Gaza wing of the Muslim Brotherhood at the beginning of the First Intifada, Hamas is known outside of the Palestinian territories chiefly for its suicide bombings and other attacks directed against Israeli civilians, as well as military and security forces targets. Hamas' charter (written in 1988 and still in effect) calls for the destruction of the State of Israel and its replacement with a Palestinian Islamic state in the area that is now Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip; in recent years, however, Hamas has floated the idea of a long-term hudna (truce) and expressed a willingness to ‘live side by side [with Israelis] and refer all issues to the coming generations.’

Hamas is listed as a terrorist organization by Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Israel, and the United States, and is banned in Jordan. According to the U.S. State Dept, the group is funded by Iran, Palestinian expatriates, and private benefactors in Saudi Arabia and other Arab states. In a 2002 report, Human Rights Watch stated that Hamas' leaders "should be held accountable for the war crimes and crimes against humanity" that have been committed by its members.

Since the death of former PLO leader Yasser Arafat, Hamas' political wing has entered and won many local elections in Gaza, Qalqilya, and Nablus. In January 2006, Hamas won a surprise victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections, taking 76 of the 132 seats in the chamber, with the ruling Fatah party trailing on 43. Vehemently anti-Israel and according to many anti-Semitic, Hamas's militant stance has found a receptive audience amongst Palestinians; many perceived the preceding Fatah government as corrupt and ineffective, and Hamas's supporters see it as a legitimate resistance movement fighting the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Hamas has further gained popularity by establishing extensive welfare programs, funding schools, orphanages, and healthcare clinics, throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. When Hamas took control, the Palestinian territories experienced a period of sharp internal conflicts, known as Fauda (anarchy), in which many Palestinians were killed in internecine fighting.

**Beliefs**

Founded in 1987, Hamas was the Gaza Strip branch of the Pan-Arab (Sunni) Islamist Muslim Brotherhood movement, which had been founded in Egypt. Hamas is opposed to the existence of Israel and has denounced the 1993 Oslo Accords, the foundation of the failed peace process, as a ‘betrayal of God's wil’. However, in 2004, Hamas offered a 10 years truce, in exchange for several conditions including a complete withdrawal from the occupied territories.

Hamas regards the territory of the present-day State of Israel — as well as the Gaza Strip and the West Bank — as an inalienable Islamic religious bequest, which can never be surrendered to non-Muslims. It asserts that struggle (jihad) to regain control of the land from Israel is the religious duty of every Muslim. This position is more radical than that now held by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which in 1988 recognized Israel's sovereignty. Hamas does not recognize Israel as a sovereign state and refers to it as the ‘Zionist entity’, a common hostile term in Arab political rhetoric, and calls for an end to the state of Israel in its charter. During the election campaign, Hamas did not mention its call for the destruction of Israel in its electoral manifesto. However several Hamas candidates insist that the charter is still in force and often called for Israel to be ‘wiped off the map’ in campaign speeches.

On January 25th, 2006, after winning the Palestinian elections, Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar gave an interview to Al-Manar TV denouncing foreign demands that Hamas recognize Israel's right to exist. After the establishment of Hamas government, Dr Al-Zahar stated his ‘dreams of hanging a huge map of the world on the wall at my Gaza home which does not show Israel on it...I hope that our dream to have our independent state on all historic Palestine (including Israel). This dream will become real one day. I'm certain of this because there is no place for the state of Israel on this land’. He also ‘didn't rule out the possibility of having Jews, Muslims and Christians living under the sovereignty of an Islamic state, adding that the Palestinians never hated the Jews and that only the Israeli occupation was their enemy’.

Hamas's charter calls for the eventual destruction of the state of Israel and the creation of an Islamic Republic in its place. Hamas sees this view as an Islamic religious duty and prophesy which comes directly from Hadith, however the group has not set a specific date for such destruction of Israel, Hamas founder, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, has mentioned the year 2027 as the possible date for destruction of Israel. The group has not issued a clear statement about how it would deal with the current population of Israel, should it succeed in overthrowing Israeli and secular Palestinian government. Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, one of its co-founders, stated that the movement's goal is ‘to remove Israel from the map’. However, on February 13, 2005, Hamas leader Khaled Mashal declared that Hamas would stop armed struggle against Israel if Israel recognized the 1967 borders, withdrew from all Palestinian territories and accept the demand for Palestinian ‘Right of Return’.

According to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Hamas views the Arab-Israeli conflict as ‘a religious struggle between Islam and Judaism that can only be resolved by the destruction of the State of Israel’. Hamas uses both political activities and violence to pursue its goal of establishing an Islamic Palestinian state in place of Israel and the secular Palestinian Authority. Israeli military operations during the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2002 put pressure on Hamas in the West Bank following several bombings in Israel for which Hamas claimed responsibility. Hamas has also engaged in peaceful political activities, including running candidates in West Bank Chamber of commerce elections. During the election campaign the organisation toned down criticism of Israel in its election manifesto, stating only that it was prepared to use ‘armed resistance to end the occupation’.

**The Covenant of Hamas**

The 1988 Hamas Covenant (or Charter) states that the organization's goal is to ‘raise the banner of God over every inch of Palestine,’ in order to establish an Islamic Republic. The thirty-six articles of the Covenant detail the movement's Islamist beliefs regarding the primacy of Islam in all aspects of life. The Covenant identifies Hamas as the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine and considers its members to be Muslims who ‘fear God and raise the banner of Jihad in the face of the oppressors.’ Hamas describes resisting and quelling the enemy as the individual duty of every Muslim and prescribes revolutionary roles for all members of society; including men and women, professionals, scientists and students.

The slogan of Hamas is ‘God is its target, the Prophet is its model, the Qur'an its constitution: Jihad is its path and death for the sake of God is the loftiest of its wishes.’ Hamas states that its objective is to support the oppressed and wronged and "to bring about justice and defeat injustice, in word and deed.’ Hamas believes that ‘the land of Palestine is an Islamic trust consecrated for future Muslim generations until Judgement Day,’ and as such, the land cannot be negotiated away by any political leader. Hamas rejects ‘so-called peaceful solutions and international conferences’ as incapable of realizing justice or restoring rights to the oppressed, believing ‘there is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad.’

The Covenant outlines the organization's position on various issues, including social and economic development and ideological influences, education, as well as its position regarding Israel. Amongst many other things, it reiterates the group's rejection of the coexistence principle of the peace process in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

*Preface:* ‘Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it.’ (A quote by Imam Hassan al Banna)

*Article 6:* ‘The Islamic Resistance Movement is a distinguished Palestinian movement, whose allegiance is to Allah, and whose way of life is Islam. It strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine, for under the wing of Islam followers of all religions can coexist in security and safety where their lives, possessions and rights are concerned.’

*Article 11:* ‘The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf consecrated for future Muslim generations until Judgement Day. It, or any part of it, should not be squandered: it, or any part of it, should not be given up.’

*Article 13:* ‘There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are all a waste of time and vain endeavors. The Palestinian people know better than to consent to having their future, rights and fate toyed with.’

*Article 28:* ‘The Zionist invasion is a vicious invasion ... It relies greatly in its infiltration and espionage operations on the secret organizations it gave rise to, such as the Freemasons, The Rotary and Lions clubs, and other sabotage groups. All these organizations, whether secret or open, work in the interest of Zionism and according to its instructions ...’

*Article 31:* ‘The Islamic Resistance Movement is a humanistic movement. It takes care of human rights and is guided by Islamic tolerance when dealing with the followers of other religions. It does not antagonize anyone of them except if it is antagonized by it or stands in its way to hamper its moves and waste its efforts. Under the wing of Islam, it is possible for the followers of the three religions - Islam, Christianity and Judaism - to coexist in peace and quiet with each other.’

*Article 32:* ‘After Palestine, the Zionists aspire to expand from the Nile to the Euphrates. When they will have digested the region they overtook, they will aspire to further expansion, and so on. Their plan is embodied in The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and their present conduct is the best proof of what we are saying.’

Suicide attacks are an element of what the group sees as its asymmetric warfare against Israel. Since the group considers all Israel to be a ‘militarized society’ (there is mandatory military service for most Jewish men and women) and Israelis to be participants in an illegal occupation of Palestinian land, Hamas does not distinguish between Israeli civilian and military targets]. The fact that this group does not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants and the group's willingness to target civilian facilities including buses, supermarkets, and restaurants is one of the main trait which supports its classification as a terrorist movement (although Hamas claims being a national liberation movement).

Hamas' position on other social and political issues:

*Article 16 (education):* It is necessary to follow Islamic orientation in educating the Islamic generations in our region by teaching the religious duties, comprehensive study of the Koran, the study of the Prophet's Sunna (his sayings and doings), and learning about Islamic history and heritage from their authentic sources. This should be done by specialised and learned people, using a curriculum that would healthily form the thoughts and faith of the Moslem student. Side by side with this, a comprehensive study of the enemy, his human and financial capabilities, learning about his points of weakness and strength, and getting to know the forces supporting and helping him, should also be included. Also, it is important to be acquainted with the current events, to follow what is new and to study the analysis and commentaries made of these events. Planning for the present and future, studying every trend appearing, is a must so that the fighting Moslem would live knowing his aim, objective and his way in the midst of what is going on around him.

*Article 18 (on women):* Woman in the home of the fighting family, whether she is a mother or a sister, plays the most important role in looking after the family, rearing the children and imbuing them with moral values and thoughts derived from Islam. She has to teach them to perform the religious duties in preparation for the role of fighting awaiting them. That is why it is necessary to pay great attention to schools and the curriculum followed in educating Moslem girls, so that they would grow up to be good mothers, aware of their role in the battle for liberation. She has to be of sufficient knowledge and understanding where the performance of housekeeping matters are concerned, because economy and avoidance of waste of the family budget, is one of the requirements for the ability to continue moving forward in the difficult conditions surrounding us. She should put before her eyes the fact that the money available to her is just like blood which should never flow except through the veins so that both children and grown-ups could continue to live.

*Article 21 (on civic culture and social responsibility):* Mutual social responsibility means extending assistance, financial or moral, to all those who are in need and joining in the execution of some of the work. Members of the Islamic Resistance Movement should consider the interests of the masses as their own personal interests. They must spare no effort in achieving and preserving them. They must prevent any foul play with the future of the upcoming generations and anything that could cause loss to society. The masses are part of them and they are part of the masses. Their strength is theirs, and their future is theirs. Members of the Islamic Resistance Movement should share the people's joy and grief, adopt the demands of the public and whatever means by which they could be realised. The day that such a spirit prevails, brotherliness would deepen, cooperation, sympathy and unity will be enhanced and the ranks will be solidified to confront the enemies.

**Allegations of Anti-Semitism**

Anti-Semitism is a recurring theme in the Hamas Covenant and speeches of its leaders. The Covenant cites The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, describing it as "the embodiment of the Zionist plan to usurp Palestine’. Other examples of Anti-Semitism in their Covenant include:

*Introduction:* Our struggle against the Jews is very great and very serious. It needs all sincere efforts. It is a step that inevitably should be followed by other steps. The Movement is but one squadron that should be supported by more and more squadrons from this vast Arab and Islamic world, until the enemy is vanquished and God's victory is realised.

*Article 7:* ... the Islamic Resistance Movement aspires to the realisation of God's promise, no matter how long that should take. The Prophet, God bless him and grant him salvation, has said: ‘The Day of Judgement will not come about until Muslims fight the Jews, when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Muslims, O slaves of God, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him. Only the Gharqad tree would not do that because it is one of the trees of the Jews.’

*Article 28:* ... when the Jews conquered the Holy City in 1967, they stood on the threshold of the Aqsa Mosque and proclaimed that ‘Mohammed is dead, and his descendants are all women.’ Israel, Judaism and Jews challenge Islam and the Moslem people. ‘May the cowards never sleep.’

Hamas categorizes the Freemasons, Lions Club, and the Rotarians as organizations promoting ‘the interest of Zionism.’ It accuses those organizations, and the ‘Zionist invasion" in general, of being "behind the drug trade and alcoholism in all its kinds.’

Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, co-founder of Hamas, reiterated beliefs of Holocaust denial as recently as one year before his 2004 death, contending that the Holocaust was a Zionist - Nazi collaboration for the purpose of encouraging emigration to Israel.

In 1998, Esther Webman of the Project for the Study of Anti-Semitism at the Tel Aviv University wrote: ‘...the anti-Semitic rhetoric in Hamas leaflets is frequent and intense. Nevertheless, anti-Semitism is not the main tenet of Hamas ideology. Generally no differentiation was made in the leaflets between Jew and Zionist, in as much as Judaism was perceived as embracing Zionism, although in other Hamas publications and in interviews with its leaders attempts at this differentiation have been made.’

According to Meir Litvak's 2003 study, ‘In Hamas' literature, anti-Semitism became almost dominant. Earlier anti-Semitic motifs are developed time and again in their magazine Falastin al-Muslama. Almost every issue contains anti-Jewish articles using elements from the Islamic tradition. Judaism is presented as a religion based on lies, which from its origin called for aggression against others and their exploitation.’

**Khaled Mashal**

Khaled Mashal, is a leader of Hamas. He has been described alternately as the ‘political leader’ of the group and the leader of Hamas's Syrian branch. He currently resides in Damascus.

**Early life and Hamas**

Khaled Mashal was born in the Silwad neighborhood of Ramallah, then ruled by Jordan. His family moved to Kuwait and lived there until 1991 Gulf War. Mashal holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Physics from Kuwait University. While at the University, he was an Islamist Palestinian leader, challenging the dominance of Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization on the campus. Mashal participated in the foundation of the Islamic Haqq Bloc, which competed with Fatah on leading the General Union for the Palestinian Students in Kuwait.

When Iraq invaded Kuwait, Mashal moved to Jordan and began his work with Hamas as one of its founders. He has been a member of the Hamas Political Bureau since its inception and became its chairman in 1996. He married in 1981 and has seven children.

**Assassination attempt**

On September 25, 1997 Mashal was the target of an assassination attempt carried out by the Israeli Mossad under orders from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his security cabinet. Ten Mossad agents carrying Canadian passports entered Jordan, where Mashal was living, and injected him with a toxic substance. At the time of the assassination attempt Mashal was considered Hamas' Jordanian branch chief.

Jordanian authorities discovered the assassination attempt and arrested two Mossad agents who had engaged in the attempt. Jordan's King Hussein then demanded that Benjamin Netanyahu turn over the poison antidote, and at first Netanyahu refused. As the incident began to grow in political significance, however, American President Bill Clinton intervened and forced Netanyahu to turn over the antidote.

Jordanian authorities later released the Mossad agents in exchange for the release of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the founder and ‘spiritual leader’ of Hamas who was serving a life sentence in an Israeli prison. In August 1999, probably in reaction to pressure from the Clinton Administration, Jordanian police issued an arrest warrant for Mashal in advance of a visit to the country by then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

**Representing Hamas internationally**

In October 2002, Mashal is believed to have met with then-Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the World Assembly of Muslim Youth in [Riyadh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riyadh). The outcome of that meeting is unknown. According to Haaretz, supposed Hamas documents discovered by Israeli security forces described the meeting as ‘excellent’. Mashal was named the most senior figure in Hamas after the assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.

Mashal was a vocal critic of former Palestinian Authority President, Chairman Yasser Arafat, often refusing to follow directives issued by the PA regarding ceasefires with Israel. Mashal is considered a key force behind this policy, along with the late Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. He attended the funeral of Yasser Arafat in Cairo, alongside the Saudi Royal family, in Cairo, Egypt, on November 12, 2004. On 9 December 2005, Mashal addressed a crowd in Damascus, Syria on the informal truce with the government of Israel that would end at the end of the year, stating that, ‘We will not enter a new truce and our people are preparing for a new round of conflict.’

Speaking from Damascus, on 29 January 2006, after the shock Hamas victory in the legislative council elections Meshaal stated that Hamas had no plans to disarm. He said that Hamas was ready to ‘unify the weapons of Palestinian factions, with Palestinian consensus, and form an army like any independent state... an army that protects our people against aggression’.

In March 2006, Mashal met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov for political talks. Russia called on Hamas to transform itself into a purely political organisation, recognise Israel's right to exist, and abide by prior peace accords with Israel. Meshal refused to compromise on the Hamas platform demanding the destruction of Israel.

On July 10, 2006, Mashal spoke authoritatively concerning the Israeli prisoner Gilad Shalit, stating Shalit was a prisoner of war and demanded a prisoner swap. On July 31, 2006, Mashal warned, in a Reuter interview, Palestinians everywhere against attempts to separate the Lebanese and Palestinian issues.

**Activities**

**Attacks against Israel**

Hamas' first use of suicide bombing occurred on April 16, 1993 when a suicide bomber driving an explosive-laden van detonated between two buses parked at a restaurant. It was Hamas' 19th known attack since 1989 (the others being shootings, kidnappings and knife attacks).

During the second Intifada, Hamas, along with the Islamic Jihad Movement, spearheaded the violence through the years of the Palestinian uprising. Since then Hamas has conducted many attacks on Israel, mainly through its military wing - the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. These attacks have included large-scale suicide bombings against Israeli civilian targets, the most deadly of which was the bombing of a Netanya hotel on March 27 2002, in which 30 people were killed and 140 were wounded. This attack has also been referred to as the Passover massacre since it took place on the first night of the Jewish festival of Passover. Overall, from November 2000 to April 2004, 377 Israeli citizens and soldiers were killed and 2,076 wounded in 425 attacks by Hamas. (Source: IDF website.) The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintains a comprehensive list of Hamas attacks.

A few female suicide bombers, including a mother of six and a mother of two children under the age of 10 have also executed suicide bombing. Hamas shelled the Gush Katif Israeli settlements in Gaza with homemade mortars. About 5500 mortar shells have landed in Gush Katif, killing 3 people before the settlements were dismantled.

Since 2002, Hamas has used homemade Qassam rockets to hit Israeli towns in the Negev, such as Sderot. The introduction of the Qassam-2 rocket has allowed Hamas to reach large Israeli cities such as Ashkelon, bringing great concern to the Israeli populace and many attempts by the Israeli military to stop the proliferation and use of the rockets.

In May 2006 Israel arrested Hamas top official Ibrahim Hamed whom Israeli security officials claim was responsible for dozens of suicide bombings and other attacks on Israelis. On June 5, 2006 the Israel Defense Forces projected that it is headed toward another violent round of clashes with the Palestinians since Hamas came to power in recent legislative elections. This prediction follows a period of relative calm, although many explosives and suspected suicide bombers are reported to have been caught at Israeli security checkpoints.

Hamas has also attacked Israeli military and security forces targets (mostly inside the West Bank and Gaza Strip and occasionally inside Israel), suspected Palestinian collaborators, and Fatah rivals.

**Funding**

According to the U.S. State Dept, Hamas is funded by Iran (led by a Shiite Islamic regime), Palestinian expatriates, and private benefactors in Saudi Arabia and other Arab states. The party is known to support families of suicide bombers after their deaths. Some believe the financial support includes a monthly allowance. However, various sources, among them United Press International, [Le Canard enchaîné](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Canard_encha%C3%AEn%C3%A9), Bill Baar and [L'Humanité](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Humanit%C3%A9) have highlighted that Hamas' early growth - before its official founding and the creation of the military branch - had been supported by the Mossad as a ‘counterbalance to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)’.

Furthermore, the French investigative newspaper Le Canard enchaîné claimed that Shin Bet had also supported Hamas as a counterweight to the PLO and Fatah, in an attempt to give "a religious slant to the conflict, in order to make the West believe that the conflict was between Jews and Muslims", thus supporting the controversial thesis of a ‘clash of civilizations’.

**History** **(Brief timeline)**

* 1984 Arrest of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, condemned to 12 years of prison after the discovery of an arms cache. Yassin is freed the next year.
* 1987 Creation of Hamas by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.
* 1987-1993 First Intifada.
* 1988 Hamas Covenant.
* 1989 Israel outlaws Hamas and imprisons Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.
* 1991 Gulf War.
* 1992 Creation of the military branch Izz ad-Din al-Qassam.
* 1993 Oslo Accords.
* April 1993. First Hamas suicide bombing at Mehola Junction.
* Palestinian legislative and presidential election, 1996. Hamas boycotts them, allowing the Fatah, led by Yasser Arafat, a large victory.
* January 5, 1996. Assassination of Yahya Ayyash, Hamas bomb maker.
* February-March 1996. 47 Israelis killed in three different bombings.
* October 1997. Freed by Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu for ‘humanitarian reasons’ (actually, due to the botched assassination attempt on Khaled Mashal, in September 25, 1997 by the Mossad in Jordan, a deal was brokered by Bill Clinton between Israel and Jordan) Sheikh Yassin is acclaimed as hero at his return to Gaza.
* September 2000. Beginning of Al-Aqsa Intifada.
* July 2002. Assassination of Salah Shahade, leader of the Ezzedeen-al-qassam brigades.
* January 6, 2004. 10 year truce (hudna) offered by senior Hamas official Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi in exchange of Israel's complete withdrawal to the 1967 borders.
* March 22 2004, assassination of Sheikh Yassin. Yassin, then an old man restricted to a wheel-chair due to his life-long paralysis was assassinated in an Israeli missile strike. Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi replaced him as the leader of Hamas. On March 28, Rantissi stated in a speech given at The Islamic University in Gaza that ‘America declared war against God. Sharon declared war against God, and God declared war against America, Bush and Sharon’.
* April 17, 2004, assassination of Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi. Rantissi was also assassinated in an air strike by the Israeli Air Force, five hours after a fatal suicide bombing by Hamas. Khaled Mashal, the leader of Hamas in Syria, said Hamas should not disclose the name of its next leader in Gaza.
* April 18 2004, Hamas secretly selected a new leader in the Gaza Strip, fearing he would be killed if his identity were made public. However, it was speculated that the new leader is Mahmoud al-Zahar; the second-in-command, Ismail Haniya; and third-in-command, Sa'id A-Siyam.
* September 2004. Israeli army chief Moshe Ya'alon said that Israel would ‘deal with [...] those who support terrorism’, including those in ‘terror command posts in Damascus’.
* September 26, 2004. Assassination of Izz El-Deen Sheikh Khalil. Sheikh Khalil was assassinated by a car bomb in Damascus, Syria. Khalil was described variously as "mid-level", "senior", a "distinguished member", and believed to be in charge of the group's military wing outside the Palestinian territories. Although the Israeli government offered no official confirmation, anonymous Israeli officials acknowledged responsibility for the attack. In a statement released in Gaza, Hamas threatened to target Israelis abroad in retaliation.
* October 2004. Assassination of Adnan al-Ghoul, assistant of Mohammed Deif, the leader of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam brigades.
* November 11, 2004. Death of Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and president of the Palestinian National Authority.
* January 2005 Palestinian presidential election. Hamas boycotts them. PLO chairman Mahmoud Abbas elected to replace Yasser Arafat.
* Palestinian municipal elections, January-May 2005. Relative success of Hamas, which took control of Beit Lahia in northern Gaza, Qalqilyah in the West Bank and Rafah.
* March 2005. Hamas proclaims tahdiyah, a period of calm.
* January 25, 2006. Victory of the Hamas at the legislative election, which took 74 seats of the 132 seats.

**Before 1987 - Palestinian Islamic activities prior to the creation of Hamas**

Sheikh Ahmed Yassin returned to Gaza from Cairo in the 1970s, where he set up Islamic charities, founding Hamas in 1987 as an offshoot of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. According to the Israeli weekly Koteret Rashit (October 1987), ‘The Islamic associations as well as the [Islamic university - founded in 1978 in Gaza] had been supported and encouraged by the Israeli military authority’ in charge of the (civilian) administration of the West Bank and Gaza. ‘They [the Islamic associations and the university] were authorized to receive money payments from abroad.’ By the end of 1992, there were 600 mosques in Gaza.

Hamas attracted members through preaching and charitable work before spreading its influence into trade unions, universities, bazaars, professional organizations and local government political races beginning in December 2004. ‘Thanks to Israel’s intelligence agency Mossad (Israel’s Institute for Intelligence and Special Tasks), the Islamists were allowed to reinforce their presence in the occupied territories. Meanwhile, the members of Fatah (Movement for the National Liberation of Palestine) and the Palestinian Left were subjected to the most brutal form of repression’, according to [L'Humanité](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Humanit%C3%A9). Indeed Israel supported and encouraged Hamas' early growth in an effort to undermine the secular Fatah movement of Yasser Arafat. According to UPI, Israel supported Hamas starting in the late 1970s as a ‘counterbalance to the Palestine Liberation Organization’. At that time, Hamas's focus was on ‘religious and social work’. The grassroots movement concentrated on social issues such as exposing corruption, administration of trusts and organizing community projects.

**1987 - The establishment of Hamas**

The acronym ‘Hamas’ first appeared in 1987 in a leaflet which accused the Israeli intelligence services of undermining the moral fiber of Palestinian youth as part of Mossad's recruitment of what Hamas termed ‘collaborators’. The use of violence by Hamas appeared almost contemporaneously with the First Intifada, beginning with the beating of Palestinians working with the Israeli government, progressing to attacks against Israeli military targets and moving on to violence aimed at civilians. As its methods have changed over the last twenty years, so has its rhetoric, now effectively claiming that Israeli civilians are ‘military targets’ by virtue of living in a state with universal military conscription. The first Hamas suicide bombing was committed in April 1994 at Hadera.

**1991 - The Persian Gulf war**

Between February and April 1988, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin raised several millions dollars from the Gulf states, which had withdrawn their funding from Fatah following its official support of Saddam Hussein during the first Gulf War. In prison since 1989, Yassin was released under ‘humanitarian reasons’ by Prime Minister Netanyahu following a failed assassination attempt on Khaled Mashal, and expelled to Jordan, from where he was allowed to return to Gaza in October 1997. The Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the military branch, was created a year before the Oslo Accords, in an attempt to block those negotiations.

**2004 - A 10-year truce**

On January 26, 2004, senior Hamas official Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi offered a 10-year truce, or [*hudna*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hudna), in return for a complete withdrawal by Israel from the territories captured in the Six Day War, and the establishment of a Palestinian state (it remade the same offer after winning the majority in the PLC, accepting the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative). Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin stated that the group could accept a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Rantissi confirmed that Hamas had come to the conclusion that it was ‘difficult to liberate all our land at this stage, so we accept a phased liberation.’ He said the truce could last 10 years, though ‘not more than 10 years’.

From the time of an attack on the Israeli southern town of Be'er Sheva in August 2004, in which 15 people were killed and 125 wounded, the truce was generally observed. Hamas violated once, in August 2005, with an attack on the same bus station, wounding seven, and in several attacks on Israeli motorists - killing six in several attacks.

End of January 2004, Steve Cohen, US civil servant mandated by the State Department and Colin Powell, assisted to a meeting with Hamas officials, according to the French newspaper Le Canard enchaîné. The mission was not only in informing itself about the objectives of the movement, according to the newspaper, but also to evaluate if Hamas could represent a counter-balance to al-Qaeda. In exchange, Hamas officials asked for the end of extra-judicial ‘targeted assassinations’ practiced against them by the Israeli military.

While the group boycotted the 2005 Palestinian presidential election, it did participate in the 2005 municipal elections organized by Yassir Arafat in the occupied territories. In those elections it won control of over one third of Palestinian municipal councils, besting [Fatah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatah), which has traditionally been ‘the biggest force in Palestinian politics’. With this electoral success behind it, Hamas contested the 2006 elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council as the main component of the List of Change and Reform.

**2005 - Israel's unilateral disengagement plan**

In 2004, in a prelude to Israel's unilateral disengagement plan from the Gaza Strip, Israeli forces carried out a number of military attacks on Gaza cities and refugees camps, seeking to draw out and kill Hamas-affiliated gunmen. Awareness of high casualties during such incursions has led the Hamas leadership to instruct its activists to avoid putting themselves needlessly in the line of fire. On 12 September 2005 IDF withdrew from the Gaza Strip and declared an official end to Israeli military rule in Gaza, though Israel still retains control of the airspace and of the sea. However the Palestinan Authority argues that the occupation is on-going, as complete sovereignty includes control of both airspace and seaways. The Gaza strip has been called an ‘open-air prison’.

Hamas claimed that this unilateral withdrawal was a victory for its armed struggle and pledged to liberate all the occupied territories, including the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Fatah, on the other hand, viewed Ariel Sharon's unilateral plan as proof of the Palestinians' failure to obtain international recognition. Both criticized the disengagement plan, citing Sharon's simultaneous encouragement of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including Ma'ale Adummim, a large settlement east of Jerusalem.

In April 2005, an advisor of hawkish Benjamin Netanyahu, principal right-wing opponent of Ariel Sharon, secretly negotiated with a Hamas representant, according to the [Le Canard enchaîné](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Canard_encha%C3%AEn%C3%A9). The meeting was about the ‘possibility of an administrative co-gestion with the Hamas in the occupied territories’, which is already the case in some Hamas-controlled cities of the West Bank, according to the French newspaper, which continues saying that: ‘But, in both sides, participants to such a dialogue keeps their mouth shut. It is impossible to admit that one has met and negotiated with his sworn enemy.’

**2006 Israel-Gaza conflict**

On June 9, during or shortly after an Israeli operation, an explosion occurred on a busy Gaza beach, killing eight Palestinian civilians. It was initially assumed that Israeli shellings was responsible for the killings, although Israeli government officials later denied this. Prompted by the recent events Hamas formally withdrew from its 16-month ceasefire on June 10, and took responsibility for the ongoing Qassam rocket attacks being launched from Gaza into Israel.

On June 24, 2006 Israeli operatives apprehended Osama and Mustafa Muamar in the Gaza Strip, alleged by Israel to be Hamas members. On June 25, a Hamas attack in Israel resulted in the deaths of two Israeli soldiers and the capture of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit. Israel then launched Operation Summer Rains on June 28 to recover the captured soldier. During the course of the ongoing operation, several PA facilities were bombed, such as the Palestinian Interior Ministry and the office of the Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniya.

On 29 June, Israel captured 64 Hamas officials. Amongst them were eight Palestinian Authority cabinet ministers and up to twenty members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, as well as heads of regional councils, and the mayor of Qalqilyah and his deputy. At least a third of the Hamas cabinet was captured and held by Israel. On 6 August Israeli forces detained the Hamas' Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Aziz Dweik, at his home in the West Bank.

**Legal action against Hamas**

In 2004, a federal court in the United States found Hamas liable in a civil lawsuit for the 1996 murders of Yaron and Efrat Ungar near Bet Shemesh, Israel. Hamas has been ordered to pay the families of the Ungars $116 million. On July 5, 2004, the court issued a default judgment against the PNA and the PLO regarding the Ungars' claim that the Palestinian Authority and the PLO provide safe haven to Hamas.

On August 20, 2004, three Palestinians, one a naturalized American citizen, were charged with a ‘lengthy racketeering conspiracy to provide money for terrorist acts in Israel’. The indicted include Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzook, senior member of Hamas, believed to be currently in Damascus, Syria and considered a fugitive. In a 2002 report, Human Rights Watch stated that Hamas' leaders ‘should be held accountable for the war crimes and crimes against humanity’ that have been committed by its members.