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## Article

# Hamas, from the Muslim Brotherhood, to the thirst to kill and dominate, and up to the atrocities of the October 7

**Abstract:** *In this paper, I analyze the links between the ideological background from which Hamas draws its roots, part of the history preceding its conflict with Israel, the transformation that Hamas went through until its establishment as a terrorist organization, and the October 7 attack on the Israeli people, along with its immediate and long-term impact. The objective of this paper is to document responses to the following questions: What are the ideological origins of Hamas? How did Hamas transform from a social movement into a terrorist organization? Was the attack planned exclusively against the Israeli*

*army and leadership as revenge for the history between them and Hamas? What were the methods and practices used by Hamas for this attack? This paper has an exploratory objective aiming to document a conflict with deep roots using a research method of document and content analysis.*

**Keywords:** *attack; kibbutz; jihad; massacre; conflict; religion*

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## Introduction

On October 7, 2023, Hamas, along with other terrorist organizations, launched an unprecedented attack on Israel, resulting in over a thousand deaths and hundreds of people being kidnapped (Human Rights Council Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2024, p. 6). It was the largest killing of Jews since the Holocaust, the largest terrorist attack on Israeli territory, but also one of the most terrifying, due to the atrocities committed. Behind everything that happened lies an ideological, political and conflictual history. From that day, also known as “Black Saturday” (IDF, The October 7 Massacre: Explained, 2024), Israel launched “Operation Iron Swords” (BITZUR, 2024), with the aim of rescuing the hostages, destroying Hamas and regaining national security. In this

paper, I propose to analyze the links between the ideological background from which Hamas draws its roots, part of the history preceding this conflict, the transformation that Hamas went through until its establishment as a terrorist organization, and the October 7 attack, along with its immediate and long-term impact. The research questions are: What are the ideological origins of Hamas? How did Hamas transform from a social movement into a terrorist organization? Was the attack planned exclusively against the Israeli army and leadership as revenge for the history between them and Hamas? What were the methods and practices used by Hamas for this attack?

The research employs qualitative methods, specifically document and content analysis, which involves examining existing texts, media, or documents to identify patterns, themes, or underlying meanings. Also, a semi-structured literature review reflects the development of Hamas and the conflict between Hamas and Israel.

The research is structured as follows: chapter 1 “Literature review” will explore the establishment of Hamas, the philosophy that influenced it and part of its conflictual history with Israel; chapter 2 “Methodology” will describe how the research was conducted, its motivation, as well as some of the most important sources used; chapter 3 “The origins of Hamas and its conflict with Israel” will analyze the evolution of Hamas from a socio-religious movement to a terrorist organization thirsty for power, especially over Gaza, as well as what led to the October 7 attack and its preparation; chapter 4 “Discussions and Results” will summarize the previous section and answer each research question; chapter 5 “Conclusions” summarize the entire paper and explain the obstacles encountered.

## 1. Literature review

Hamas, an acronym for “*Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*” (Islamic Resistance Movement) is a Palestinian terrorist organization, recognized by countries worldwide, including US, UK, Canada, Australia, Japan, and the European Union. (IDF, the hamas terrorist organization) It was established during the beginning of the First Intifada, the Palestinian civil revolt against Israeli occupation, which began in December 1987 <sup>(Post, 2009)</sup>. Hamas was founded by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin (b.1936-d.2004) and other members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine (ECFR). The Brotherhood is an influential Islamic organization founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna in Egypt <sup>(Harmon)</sup>. He called for the religious reformation of individual Muslims, the progressive moral purification of Muslim societies and their eventual political unification in a Caliphate under Sharia law <sup>(gov.uk, 2015)</sup>. The Brotherhood sought to revitalize Islam and to establish an Islamic state, with no distinction between religion and the state <sup>(Post, 2009)</sup>. To al-Banna and other religious conservatives, the problems of foreign economic, political and military domination were compounded by the spread of Western secular values and practices (Wickham, 2013, p. 22). The belief of the Muslim Brotherhood was that the key to the country’s (Egypt) moral and social renewal, as well as the only effective means to wrest it free from foreign control, was a return to Islam <sup>(Wickham, 2013)</sup>. According to Hasan al-Banna, every Muslim must take part in jihad: “Today the Muslims, as you know, are compelled to humble themselves before non-Muslims, and are ruled by unbelievers [...] Hence it has become an individual obligation, which there is no evading, on every Muslim to prepare his equipment, to make up his mind to engage in jihad, and to get ready for it until the opportunity is ripe” (Wickham, 2013, p. 26).

The conflict between Hamas and the Israeli state is well-documented in the literature by scholars.

Anthony H. Cordesman (Cordesman, 2009) states that during the 2008-2009 Gaza War, or Operation Cast Lead to the Israeli forces, Hamas proved its weaknesses in warfare, relying primarily on prolonged rocket or mortar attacks, using Gazan civilians as human shields. In this conflict, which took place both in the air and on the ground, the IDF used the latest available tactics, which took Hamas by surprise, such as night warfare, drones (UAVs), remote-controlled weapons and armored bulldozers. In this war, the IDF lost only 10 soldiers, with minimal equipment destroyed, while Hamas suffered between 300 and 1100 casualties. Despite this contrast, in the end, Hamas leaders claimed victory as their own, primarily for propaganda reasons.

Jeffrey White (White, 2014) says that in the 2014 Hamas-Israel conflict, which lasted 50 days, Hamas demonstrated improvements on the battlefield, from tactics to arsenal and even their ability to fire under intense IDF pressure. That moment showed the results of Hamas's learning process and its complex methods of warfare, from defensive tunnels, booby traps, snipers and suicide attacks. All of these presented obstacles and made the IDF's mission more difficult.

## 2. Methodology

To find answers to the research questions regarding the origins, I have employed qualitative methods, specifically document and content analysis, which involves examining existing texts, media, or documents to identify patterns, themes, or underlying meanings. Also, I conducted a semi-structured literature review to capture the development of Hamas and the conflict between Hamas and Israel.

The analysis was conducted during June/July 2025 and I decided to investigate this topic given the current open conflict, the history of animosity between Israel and Hamas, and especially the unprecedented magnitude of the attack on October 7. Also, I wanted to discover how this moment was possible and how the terrorists acted, given the defense and security capabilities that Israel has been recognized for in the recent decades. I used sources of information such as the United Nations report about 7 October (Human Rights Council Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2024) as well as the published discoveries of the IDF (IDF, The October 7 Massacre: Explained, 2024) for detailed aspects regarding the atrocities committed. Furthermore, to understand Hamas mentality, beliefs and evolution, I analyzed, among other sources, the organization's 1988 Covenant (Hamas, 1988), as well as the history of the Muslim Brotherhood (Wickham, 2013).

## 3. The origins of Hamas and its conflict with Israel

Despite its contemporary actions, Hamas initially began as a social and religious movement in 1987, building hundreds of mosques in impoverished Gaza (Post, 2009). Nevertheless, the situation changed when the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (launched in 1964) entered into a peace process with Israel, which created the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994 to have limited authority over the West Bank and Gaza. (Zanotti, 2024) As a reaction to the process, Hamas emerged as an alternative to the secular Fatah movement, which conducts the PLO, through violent attacks on Israeli civilian and military targets. (Zanotti, 2024) One year after

its inception, Hamas's 1988 charter stated the group's goal as the destruction of Israel, as well as the establishment of an Islamic state in all of historical Palestine which includes present-day Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, and also asserted anti-Semitic rhetoric. (Zanotti, 2024) After the Second Intifada (2000-2005), Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005 (IDF, the Hamas terrorist organization) and unilaterally cedes responsibility for Gaza to the PA, but Israel with Egypt retains control over land/sea/air access. (Zanotti, 2024) It marked the end of Israeli presence inside the Gaza Strip for the first time since the Six-Day War in 1967. ((OCHA), 2005, p. 1) On 15 November 2005, an agreement was reached between the Government of Israel (Gol) and the Palestine Authority (PA) "...facilitating the movement of people and goods within the Palestinian Territories and on opening an international crossing on the Gaza-Egypt border that will put the Palestinians in control of the entry and exit of people". The agreement also spoke of the movement of Palestinians from Gaza Strip to the West Bank through Erez crossing and an increased flow of goods, especially exports. ((OCHA), 2005) Following these events, the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council election took an unexpected turn when Hamas won with a large majority, defeating Fatah, and took the lead of the new PA cabinet (Zanotti, 2024), raising doubts about the future of Israeli-Palestinian relationship.

Regional geopolitics would be thrown into disarray in 2007 after Hamas forcibly seized control of Gaza in a bloody coup, after failing to work together with Fatah, worsening economic and humanitarian conditions under its authoritarian regime. (Zanotti, 2024) Fatah took over the leadership of the Palestine Authority, headed by the president of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas, and gained control of the West Bank.

The period following the separation of Gaza from the West bank in 2007 was filled with a series of major conflicts between Israel and Hamas in: 2008-2009, 2012, 2014 and 2021. (Eilam, 2023)

Hamas's pursuit of revenge has grown exponentially after each confrontation with Israel, yet the origins of its hostility are much longer. The 1988 Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement begins with a quote from the third chapter of the Qur'an, after which hatred towards Israel is clearly stated with a phrase from Hassan al-Banna: "Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it". Other parts of the Covenant that highlight the animosity are: "Our struggle against the Jews is very great and very serious", "The Movement is but one squadron that should be supported by more and more squadrons from the vast Arab and Islamic world, until the enemy is vanquished and Allah's victory is realised." and "In the face of the Jews' usurpation of Palestine, it is compulsory that the banner of Jihad be raised." (Hamas, 1988)

The preparation for the moment when the jihad would begin was long and meticulous. Training videos posted by Hamas, mistaken for propaganda, reveal their targeted training for an invasion of Israel. Some of their training sites were built to replicate the Israeli infrastructure, such as border fences, yellow gates, buildings, watchtowers and domes. Terrorists used remote devices to blow up buildings, gates, concrete barriers and other security features. They also honed their coordination while being divided into multiple teams to capture as many areas as possible. From infiltrating enemy territory on the ground, taking off and landing with powered paragliders, disabling tanks, to capturing hostages and kidnapping them – all were practiced in several camps spread across the Gaza Strip. The date of the 2023 attack was also carefully chosen because it coincided with two Jewish holidays: Shemini Atzeret which began at sunset on October 6th along with Simchat Torah, which began at sunset on October 7th until

nightfall on October 8th (TORONTO). Ali Barakeh, a member of Hamas' exiled leadership, revealed that: "We made them think that Hamas was busy with governing Gaza [...] All the while, under the table, Hamas was preparing for this big attack." (IDF, Senior Hamas Official: "We Sacrifice Ourselves", 2023); "Zero hour was not known to anyone other than a handful [of commanders]. We picked the right time when the enemy is busy with their holidays." (Guardian, 2023)

On Saturday, October 7 2023, at 6:30 am, Hamas, along with several other Palestinian terrorist groups, began its attack by launching a barrage of more than 2500 rockets from the Gaza Strip to Israel, triggering red alerts for authorities and civilians from villages near the border. Hidden under these missiles, paragliders with armed terrorists entered the airspace, while their drones were used to drop explosive devices and flammable substances over Israeli towers, sensors and automatic weapons.

Clashes also took place at sea, starting at 6:45 am, when terrorists attempted to use boats to invade the shore. The Israeli Navy's "Snafir" Unit was able to eliminate some of them, but around 10 militants still reached Zikim Beach. Hamas fired at various public places on the beach, including a block of toilets, where six people died (Council, 2024) and a public shelter, where they also threw grenades, killing at least three people. It is believed that at least four people survived the attack on the shelter. One of the survivors said that she had pretended to be dead to survive. (Human Rights Council Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2024, p. 22) A total of 18 civilians, of which 5 were children, lost their lives on the beach. (gov.il, 2023)

On the ground, a large number of terrorists, distributed in groups, managed to penetrate Israeli territory, destroying the border in over 100 places. (IDF, The October 7 Massacre: Explained, 2024) They implemented the tactics practiced in the Gaza training camps, blowing holes in fences and border walls with explosives, sometimes followed by bulldozers to widen them so vehicles could pass. Subsequently, Hamas militants entered Israeli territory on foot, mopeds and pick-up trucks, heading towards military bases and civilian settlements near the border.

A kibbutz is a type of settlement which is unique to Israel, a place where people work together, often a farm or a factory. There are more than 20 kibbutzim along the Gaza border, most of which were targeted by Hamas on October 7, including Nahal Oz, Kfar Aza, Nirim, Holit etc., with two of the most affected being Be'eri and Nir Oz.

Kibbutz Be'eri suffered one of the greatest losses of life, with over 105 residents dying, almost 10 percent of its entire population., and 30 individuals being kidnapped. The attack began around 6:55 am, with two terrorists failing to enter the yellow gate, which was later opened by a local civilian in a car, who was eventually killed. After entering the kibbutz, they slaughtered people and animals alike and shot houses and cars. A 10-month-old baby girl was the youngest victim, while the oldest was an 88-year-old woman. The terrorists set fire to, vandalized and destroyed several cars and buildings, 26 structures were completely destroyed and 31 were damaged to varying degrees, around 34 percent of the kibbutz structures. Thirty Israelis were abducted to the Gaza Strip, including more than nine women and ten children. (Human Rights Council Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2024, pp. 9-11)

Kibbutz Nir Oz was the most affected by the destruction of property, with more than 80 percent of its residential buildings damaged or destroyed, many due to fires. Forty-six people lost their lives, around 10 percent of its population, the same as in the case of Be'eri. The as-



sault began at 6:49 am, once two cars entered the northern gate, being followed by at least four armed terrorists walking on foot, as well as others who entered from the western side. After attacking one of the kibbutz residents, 74-year-old Braha Levinson, Hamas filmed her surrounded by a pool of blood in her living room, a video they also posted on her Facebook, where it was seen by her family members. It took a month for authorities to identify her, because the house was burned down while the body remained inside. Seventy-two human beings, including thirty-five women and fourteen children, were abducted from Nir Oz. (Human Rights Council Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2024, pp. 11-14)

The Nova Festival, which took place on October 6 and 7, 2023, near kibbutz Re'im and 5 kilometers from Gaza, was the place where over a third of the victims of the invasion met their end. Of the 3000 people present at the festival, 379 were killed, including 364 participants and 15 Israeli police officers. (Affairs, 2023) At 6:22 am the music was stopped following the activation of the red alert and sirens due to rockets being fired from Gaza. The terrorists' paragliders could also be seen in the sky, which later landed in the festival area and in some kibbutzim. In an attempt to escape, many participants drove towards road 232. Due to the large number of people trying to leave the area, traffic jams were created both in the festival parking lot and at the intersections with road 232. The blockage was also fueled by those who decided to abandon their cars on route and flee on foot. In this chaos, people, both on road and in the field surrounding the festival, were shot by terrorists from multiple directions. Many of those who remained and hid in the main festival venue were killed, including over 15 people inside and around the main bar, some of whom had tried to hide in refrigerators. In total, forty people, including some from different countries, were kidnapped. (Human Rights Council Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2024, pp. 15-16)

## **4. Discussions and Results**

What are the ideological origins of Hamas?

Hamas traces its roots and founding members to the Islamic organization the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood's founder, Hasan al-Banna, wanted religious reform and a purification of Muslim societies, accompanied by a political unification of them into a Caliphate, an Islamic state under the Sharia law. In this state, there would no longer be a difference between religion and state. A return to Islam was, in the Brotherhood's belief, the key to moral and social renaissance, which had until then been obstructed by the economic, political and military problems exacerbated by Western values. Liberation from foreign domination could be achieved through Jihad, in which every Muslim was required to take part.

How did Hamas transform from a social movement into a terrorist organization?

The shift came as a reaction to the creation of the Palestinian Authority in 1994, which was established as a result of the peace process between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel. Following these events, Hamas asserted itself as an alternative to the Fatah movement, the PLO's leader, by attacking Israeli civilians and soldiers. Hamas had already stated its anti-Israel rhetoric and goal of destroying Israel in its 1988 charter. Despite winning elections in 2006, Hamas resorted to a bloody coup to rule Gaza.

Was the attack planned exclusively against the Israeli army and leadership as a revenge for the history between them and Hamas?

No, because Hamas has also attacked various public and community settings, killing hundreds of civilians. The terrorists attacked those on a public beach, in the toilets and in the shelters located there, taking the lives of 18 civilians, including 5 children. They have also attacked a number of Kibbutzim, a settlement where people work together, killing hundreds of residents, including a 10-month-old baby, and destroying their homes. About a third of the victims on October 7 were participants in the Nova music Festival.

What were the methods and practices used by Hamas for this attack?

They implemented tactics prepared and rehearsed in their training camps. Hamas initially launched a barrage of 2500 rockets, followed by paragliders and drones from the air. They then penetrated the border with explosives and bulldozers, allowing them to enter Israel on foot, on mopeds and in pick-up trucks.

## 5. Conclusion

In its more than 35 years of existence, Hamas has transformed from a social and religious movement in 1987 into a bloody terrorist organization in 1988 that is greedy for power, especially for the rule of Gaza. Driven by ideology and religious fundamentalism, originating from the Muslim Brotherhood, they have sought to oppress and even annihilate anyone and anything that stood in their way. These include: Fatah, which they removed in a bloody coup, but also Israel and its citizens, with whom they have had a long series of complex conflicts, each fueling Hamas desire for revenge.

After each battle fought against Israel, Hamas analyzed the mistakes it made and sought solutions to avoid further losses, both on the battlefield, in soldiers and equipment, and those suffered inside Gaza, such as infrastructure and civilians. They improved their tactics and technology, although still inferior to Israel, they trained specifically for the neighboring enemy, and when the opportune moment arrived, they unleashed the jihad.

The terrorist attack of October 7 is the deadliest massacre against Jews since the Holocaust, with over 1200 victims and 252 hostages.

With this attack, Hamas continued to carry forward and apply the beliefs originating both from the Muslim Brotherhood and its own charter, such as antisemitism, hatred of Israelis and Jihad.. It managed to defeat through a well-thought-out plan and with simple equipment an opponent notorious for its military capabilities, which was superior both in terms of border defense and intelligence services, with an army that was equipped with latest technologies available. It was demonstrated once again that no defense is impenetrable, especially when faced with an unprecedented situation, both on land and water and in the air. The offensive was not intended exclusively against the leadership of the state or the army, but was a pogrom aimed at causing as many losses of life, trauma and damages as possible to the Israeli civilians.

What happened on October 7 is of an extraordinary brutality, fueled by a terrorist regime that built a mass of followers through long indoctrination and the cultivation of feelings of hatred and anti-Semitism. Hamas has made sure to inflict as much trauma on Israelis as possible by documenting the atrocities they have committed and distributing them online, many of which have been picked up by the media. For them, it is a victory they want to capitalize on and build upon with future threats and attacks until Israel is destroyed.

This paper aimed to document responses to the four research questions, previously mentioned. The paper is relevant because of its timeliness. One impediment I encountered is the impossibility of researching and analyzing in the location in question, as well as interviewing survivors. In addition, there are still questions and issues that need to be clarified by the competent authorities and organizations regarding most of the aspects discussed.

## Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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