



Hamas Is a Jihadist Organization Committed to Israel's Total Destruction

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: In order to understand the nature of the strategic surprise inflicted by Hamas on Israel on October 7, it is essential to understand its jihadist orientation, which was formulated on the movement's founding and has never changed. While Israel employs a Western military concept that avoids war and sanctifies the value of life, the jihadist concept aspires to self-sacrifice, death, and a cosmic religious struggle against "Jewish infidels." Hamas has no concern whatsoever for the welfare of the local Gazan population, which means it does not have the Achilles' heel of the Israeli side: the commitment to uphold the sanctity of life for both its citizens and its soldiers. Israel continues to operate using a Western democratic approach in the face of an eternal jihad. It will have no choice but to fight the jihadist mindset without any containment or restraint.

As of October 7, 2023, the State of Israel has been conducting the "Swords of Iron" war in the south following a strategic surprise by the Islamic resistance movement Hamas. Hundreds of its armed operatives breached the security fence along the Gaza Strip border in the early morning hours, resulting in the murder of over 1,300 Israelis and abduction of 199 Israelis who are now captives in Gaza. It appears that operation "Storm Al-Aqsa" (Tufan al-Aqsa) was planned in advance by the military wing of Hamas with the goals of challenging the Israeli establishment,

showing Israel that it has a strong enemy that will not surrender, causing terror, deterring Israel, and demonstrating success for Hamas's patron, Iran.

In order to understand the depth of the strategic surprise that Israel experienced on October 7, it is important to grasp the jihadist ideological orientation of the Islamic resistance movement. In the context of the confrontation with Israel, the Sunni Hamas entity (the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood) maintains close, long-term strategic partnerships with the Shi'ite Iranian regime through the Quds force of the Revolutionary Guards and the Iranian intelligence ministry.

The name "Hamas" is an acronym for Islamic Resistance Movement (Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyah), and that name signifies zeal and fanaticism. The motto of Hamas encapsulates its core idea: "Allah is its target, the Prophet is its example, the Quran is its constitution, jihad is its path, and death for the sake of Allah is its highest aspiration."

Hamas was founded in Gaza upon the outbreak of the first intifada in December 1987 by Sheikh Ahmed Ismail Yassin as the political and military arm of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Hamas movement has two central characteristics at its core: Islamic and Palestinian nationalist. Its purpose at the time of its creation was to challenge the traditional leadership of the PLO under the leadership of Fatah and advance an uncompromising religious struggle against the State of Israel, with the ultimate goal of Israel's total destruction. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is perceived purely in religious terms, pitting Islam against "infidel" Jews and viewing the "Palestine issue" as a religious and Muslim problem, not a political one.

The Hamas charter, dating back to August 1988, outlines its commitment to resistance against the very existence of Israel, which precludes any degree of recognition or engagement with it. In its first article, the charter states that "the path of the Islamic Resistance Movement is the path of Islam from which it draws its ideas, concepts, and perceptions of the world, life, and humanity." Its primary purpose is to carry out an armed struggle until the complete disappearance of Israel from all territories.

Hamas envisions the establishment of an Islamic Palestinian state on all the lands of Israel. According to the charter, "the Islamic Resistance Movement asserts that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf (endowment) consecrated for future Muslim generations until Judgment Day and it is not right for anyone to yield or

abandon it" (Article 11). "The Islamic Resistance Movement is a single battalion of the *ummah* (Muslim community) waging jihad in the way of Allah" against the Zionist "invasion" (Article 7), and the "jihad to liberate Palestine is an individual duty" (Fard al-'Ayn) for every Muslim. "There is no escape from spreading the spirit of jihad... and no way to elude confronting the enemies" (Article 15).

The Hamas Covenant portrays the Jewish enemies, in contrast to the purportedly heroic jihadist warriors, as ruthless Nazis. It states, "The enemy behaves with cruelty and atrocity, showing Nazism between a man and a woman, or between an adult and a child... The enemy relies on the breaking of bones, shooting women, the elderly, and children - with or without cause... In their heinous acts, they treat people in the most brutal way, like war criminals" (Article 20). Therefore, "Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated what was before it" (Opening of the Covenant).¹

Despite more than two decades having passed since the formulation of the 1988 charter, Hamas has not wavered or altered its commitment in any way to the ideological principles it contains. Even in its newer political document of May 2017, these messages are not diminished and the central goal is reaffirmed: the total destruction of the State of Israel and the denial of the right of self-determination for the Jewish people. In the newer document, it is emphasized once again that the struggle for the liberation of Palestine grants full legitimacy to all actions by the "resistance organizations," meaning the Palestinian terrorist organizations. The violent "struggle" is seen as the way forward on the homeland: "The struggle will continue until the achievement of liberation, the implementation of the return, and the establishment of a state with full sovereignty over Jerusalem" (Opening of the document).

The primary enemy of Hamas remains the Jewish people. "The Israeli entity is a means of the Zionist project and the most dangerous aggressive base for it. The Zionist project is not confined to the borders of Palestine. It is hostile to the Arab nation and is aggressive towards it. It poses a real danger to it... The Zionist project is also a threat to international security and peace, and to humanity, its interests, and its stability" (Articles 14-15). Hence the duty of jihad, "the fight against the occupation in all its forms and means, is a legitimate right guaranteed by divine laws, the norms and laws of international law, and in the depths of the structured struggle" (Article 25)². This text, as well as the earlier text in the Covenant, leaves no doubt regarding Hamas's intention to conduct all manner of violence against

Jews - with all means deemed valid - for as long as is required to expunge Israel from the earth.

Indeed, over the years and especially in recent times, we have come to understand the deep connection between Hamas's extremist religious rhetoric and its patterns of ruthless actions in the spirit of jihad. Israel has often found itself facing an adversary that appears calculating and pragmatic on the surface, willing to engage in cost-benefit considerations, but only on the territorial level. A deeper analysis shows that this is an actor with a different thought pattern, one that is not at all rooted in Western rationality but rather in extreme religious fundamentalism and an unwavering commitment to the struggle to the death against the Zionist entity.

Hamas, the Islamist terrorist organization, embarked on the current war with full awareness of the threat its actions would pose to the Gaza Strip, its residents, and its assets, and that its actions could impact the legitimacy of the ruling authority both internally and internationally. Yet it did not hesitate, and immediately achieved a symbolic victory in the initial stages on October 7. The well-planned and well-timed attack occurred during a major Jewish holiday, the celebration of Simchat Torah, and on a sacred Shabbat. Hamas estimated that Israel would seek a ceasefire, engage in discussions about a prisoner exchange, avoid bold moves, and not harm its rule in Gaza.

In drawing this conclusion, Hamas relied on numerous indications from the Israeli side over the years that in Jerusalem's view, harming Hamas and removing it from power could lead to even more sinister and undesirable elements taking control (and it's a valid question today if such elements exist). In previous decades, the Hamas leadership learned that Israel is inclined towards containment, not resolution or victory. In other words, Israel's priority was to maintain the current situation and avoid expanding military operations in an asymmetric conflict. The focus was on preserving the status quo, not altering it.

It's essential to emphasize the critical difference in combat doctrine of the two parties. While the Israeli side adheres to a Western approach to warfare, Hamas, a terrorist organization, takes a clear jihadist approach. At the core of the classic Western understanding of warfare is the idea that war is only resorted to as a last resort and it should be as short as possible, with a focus on minimizing harm to human lives, both civilian and military, on both sides. The principle of utilizing

advanced technological capabilities and minimizing casualties is paramount. These are characteristics of the Israeli military's approach to warfare, even today.

The jihadist perspective characteristic of Hamas and the other Islamist terrorist organizations, such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad, stands in stark contrast. According to their perspective, only violent and uncompromising struggle against the "infidels" - jihad - has true value and constitutes a religiously mandated imperative. Jihad carries a clear operational meaning: military action intended to expand the dominion of Islam and eliminate the "infidels" by any means necessary and for as long as it takes.

One of the key principles of this extremist viewpoint is the value of martyrdom, which is vastly different from the Western concept of life. Death holds a supreme value, and self-sacrifice (the suicide operation) is seen as glorious and desirable. In this extreme perspective, a protracted struggle without a set time frame is a deliberate process designed to exhaust the enemy.

The conflict is based on a total lack of consideration for the worth of the jihadis' own human resources³. Consequently, any attack by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the Gaza Strip is not perceived by Hamas as a threat to be avoided. Quite the contrary. There is no consideration whatsoever for the welfare of the local population. This means there is no Achilles' heel, as there is on the Israeli side, which upholds the sanctity of life for both its citizens and its soldiers. Israel continues to operate using a Western democratic approach in the face of an eternal, endless, and cosmic jihad.

The key to defining Israel's mission in the current conflict with the brutal terrorist organization in the south, Hamas, is to establish a clear, unambiguous goal. Is it to oust the Hamas government? To reduce Hamas's terrorism? To provide relief to the residents of the south? To attain calm in the south? Israel is currently presented with a unique opportunity to leverage its military power to pressure Hamas and fundamentally shift the strategic balance in the region. Israel enjoys unprecedented international legitimacy, with strong support from the United States and President Joe Biden. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) are mobilizing in large numbers, and the approximately 300,000 reservists who have been called up are highly motivated. The residents of the south are showing resilience and a strong sense of national unity. There is a sense that the nation is coming together,

even when it comes to the prospect of a major confrontation with Hamas and its backers that could exact a heavy price if the war extends deep into the Gaza Strip.

Thus far, the IDF is primarily targeting Hamas's assets from the air and is avoiding a ground operation. Hamas's core stronghold, the network of tunnels underneath the Gaza Strip - the "jihadist brain" - remains untouched. The military restraint of the IDF, operating in line with a Western-humanitarian perspective, is likely to be seen as a weakness by the other side. The fighters of Hamas consider themselves victorious, as they were capable of returning to their land (the fortified Gaza Strip) after committing atrocities on Israeli citizens on their own ground.

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¹ מרכז המידע למודיעין ולטרור, אמנת החמאס, המרכז למורשת המודיעין (2006)
² דחוח-הלוי, יהונתן, המסמך המדיני של חמאס – תרגום הגרסה הרשמית הסופית, המרכז הירושלמי לענייני ציבור ומדינה (2017).
³ אורטל, ערן, האתגר האסימטרי של ג'יהאד, מערכות, 417, עמ' 4-11 (2008).