



## Hamas Is ISIS

by Dr. Galit Truman-Zinman

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Are Hamas's brutal patterns of action, especially those of Saturday, October 7, 2023, comparable to those of ISIS? A comparison of the two Islamic terrorist organizations indicates a conceptual and practical similarity, including: shared fundamentalist ideology, their status as hybrid entities, their control over populations, Islamic indoctrination, education to hate, brutal operating methods, and commitment to jihad. The State of Israel, which just experienced the worst terrorist attack since its establishment, must continue to advance its tactical and strategic goal of eliminating Hamas with the clear message: Hamas is equal to ISIS.

Ever since the violent strategic surprise by Hamas on the southern settlements of Israel on October 7, comparisons between ISIS and Hamas have proliferated in the media and at the political level. The numerous acts of horror, including beheadings, rape, and the killing of innocents, intensified the sense that the people of Israel had encountered brutal terrorism in the style of ISIS.

### **Brief historical background**

ISIS, or the "Islamic State", gained international attention in the summer of 2014 because of its rapid conquests in northwestern Iraq, eastern Syria, and northwestern Syria. At the end of June 2014, the "Islamic State" announced the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate. Under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-

Baghdadi, this terrorist organization worked to change the existing political-social order and ruled an extreme Islamic regime.

ISIS's actions were characterized by extremism and depraved cruelty. The methods of warfare were reflected in the violent occupation of cities and harm dealt to the civilian populations, including mass executions of opponents and "infidels" who did not belong to the extremist doctrine of ISIS. The media and social networks disseminated well-edited and professional messages every day about ISIS's successes and its persistent struggle against the "leavers of Islam", the "infidels", and the "crusaders". The media extensively described the brutality of the terrorist attacks and ISIS's methods of operation, including executions, torture, beheadings, dismemberment of bodies, burning people alive, crucifixions, hangings, abuse, and rape. The documentation of its attacks on many platforms served as ISIS propaganda geared toward supporters and sympathizers among Muslims and potential converts to Islam, and also functioned as psychological warfare against a variety of target audiences, such as opponents in the West and Arab countries and the civilian populations under its control.

Another Islamist terrorist organization, Hamas, has over the years of its existence conducted a steady stream of acts of violence, subversion and terrorism directed against the State of Israel and its citizens. Ever since its establishment at the beginning of the first intifada in December 1987, the organization has had etched on its flag the message of "resistance" with the aim of destroying Israel and "purifying" the *waqf* territories (holy lands) "for generations until the end of time". Hamas's military capabilities have been upgraded over the years, starting with suicide attacks in Israeli cities, through shootings from steep locations, attacks at border crossings, and kidnappings to the digging of a vast underground array of offensive and defensive tunnels and the use of drones.

Hamas receives help from Iran, which shares Hamas's goal of the total destruction of the State of Israel and wishes to ignite conflict within its borders. Iranian aid to Hamas fits into Tehran's policy of "exporting the revolution" and its desire to spread a "model" Islamic society from Iran to the rest of the globe. The support includes comprehensive financial funding, smuggling of advanced weapons (long-range rockets, anti-tank missiles), training for Hamas operatives, sharing of knowledge through experts, consultants and engineers in order to establish

infrastructure for the production of rockets and explosive charges made in Gaza, and more.

On the morning of October 7, 2023, thousands of Hamas operatives breached the security fence on the border of the Gaza Strip and crossed the border at 15 different checkpoints. They infiltrated IDF bases and outposts, border settlements, and cities. They attacked thousands of Israelis with extraordinary brutality, including residents of (and visitors to) the south, attendees at a big nature party, and soldiers who were guarding the southern sector. The terrorists were proud of their atrocities. They took pictures and videos and proclaimed on social networks their intention to return to the “occupied land of Palestine”.

As a result of the massive infiltration by Hamas, approximately 1,400 Israelis were killed, 5,431 wounded, and 229 taken prisoner and abducted to Gaza. This is the worst terrorist incident the State of Israel has experienced since its establishment, and some equate it to 09/11/2001.

### **Comparative criteria - ISIS versus Hamas**

An in-depth examination of various criteria shows a conceptual and practical similarity between ISIS and Hamas.

**Fundamentalist ideology** - Both terrorist organizations employ an extreme interpretation of Islam and aspire to return to the days of glory and a government based on sharia only. Both deny the values of the West (democracy, liberalism) and demonstrate an activist and militant reaction towards the West. They enforce fundamentalist Islamic law by force in the name of an uncompromising violent jihad. The world is divided into “true believers” and “infidels” who must be eliminated.

**Hybrid entities** - Hamas and ISIS are both sub-state hybrid entities that combine an army, violence and coercion together with control and the provision of basic services to the civilian population. These are terrorist organizations that operate simultaneously in the field of military terrorism and in the civilian field.

**Control over populations** - Both terrorist organizations control local residents while using sharia law and religious punishment within the framework of

government and foreign policy. In both cases, institutions of government, economy, banking and taxation, religious police, educational institutions, sharia courts, and recruitment and propaganda offices were established. Their organizational strategy includes territorial control over the population and the formation of a political, economic, educational and legal administration.

**Islamic indoctrination** - In territories occupied by terrorist organizations (Syria, Iraq, African and Asian regions/Gaza Strip), strict religious preaching is carried out in mosques and in the streets, in madrassas and educational institutions, and in the media and on social networks.

**Education** - In both terrorist organizations, emphasis is placed on teaching hatred of the “other” and Islamic studies in the fundamentalist format. In both cases, a formal education system was established in the schools alongside an informal education system, youth and sports clubs, summer camps, and military training camps for children and teenagers. Hamas teaches values like the right of return, the liberation of Palestine, shahada (martyrdom), and the destruction of the State of Israel.

**Brutal methods of operation** - In both terrorist organizations, the methods of operation against “infidels”, “dissidents”, and “leavers of Islam” include violence and cruelty, such as beheading, cutting off body parts, rape, burning, and crucifixion. Both terrorist organizations use stabbings, sabotage, bombings, shootings, and many other methods of violence against all enemies without distinction. They place deliberate emphasis on the exercising of extreme cruelty to spread fear and terror among the public.

**Jihad** - In both terrorist organizations, the use of jihad, or holy war against infidels, and the principle of “takhfir” (the shedding of the blood of people perceived as infidels or enemies, whether at home or abroad) is justified. They encourage Muslims everywhere to join the ranks of jihad and strive for martyrdom. There is an obligation to spread the religious tradition and free the lands of Islam from the presence of foreigners. This, with the help of jihad, is seen by both terrorist groups as the personal duty of every Muslim. According to the jihadist view, the enemies of Islam must be fought by any means, including extreme violence.

At the same time, there are points of difference between ISIS and Hamas. First, Gaza's terrorist organization has not only managed to survive for decades since 1987 but has also developed into a kind of state and with military strength. Hamas has cultivated useful collaborations with both Sunni and Shia terrorist organizations and became the **symbol of national and religious resistance** in the region, though it was not established as a national movement.

Second, ISIS is characterized by **global terrorism** and aims to conquer the whole world (in stages), in contrast to the local terrorism of Hamas, which is intended to "purify" and "liberate" the territories of "occupied" Palestine, as defined by them. ISIS's ambitions are global, and its fighters work vigorously to shape a new political-social reality in different regions and on different continents. By contrast, Hamas is the local Palestinian military arm of the Muslim Brotherhood. It grew out of a larger social movement. Its purpose was to stimulate a religious revival in the Gaza Strip, to subvert the traditional control of the PLO, and to fight the Zionist entity. Their uncompromising struggle is being waged at the local (not global) level against the State of Israel and under the banner of Islam. Hamas cultivates the image of a national liberation organization to gain international legitimacy and promote its goals, while in practice it was established as a resistance movement to the Zionist enemy and not as a national movement.

Third, they differ in their establishment of **functioning governmental structures**. Since the establishment of Hamas, it has aspired to be the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The terrorist organization has a deep hold on Palestinian society, and its DNA is mixed with that of the local population in the Gaza Strip. It has thus won the civilian population's support and has recruited fighters from their ranks. Hamas has turned from a military and opposition body to the Palestinian Authority into a ruling party and the dominant political entity in Palestinian society in the region. Ever since its violent takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007, Hamas has functioned as a quasi-state entity, ruling with a heavy hand and exclusively managing the lives of the Palestinians it controls. Today it is a complex organization of army, society, religion, and politics.

On the other hand, ISIS, which became a state in 2014 in territories of Syria and Iraq, was unable to remain sovereign and maintain governance in those areas. The

organization tried to promote a functioning government and gain support from the residents, but by 2017 it had lost most of its territories and ability to reign.

Fourth, the **main effort** of Hamas is directed against the State of Israel and Jews. The conflict with Israel is seen as a religious conflict between Islam and the “infidel” Jews, and the “Palestine problem” is a religious Muslim problem. Hence the choice of an uncompromising jihad against Israel and the refusal to accept any agreement that recognizes Israel’s right to exist. Hamas is mobilized for prolonged resistance and the undermining of the State of Israel. By contrast, ISIS’s effort is against Arab regimes that cooperate with the West, secular Arab regimes that are considered “infidels”, and the West and Israel (but to a lesser degree).

Finally, the **attitude towards Iran and Shiites** differs in the two terrorist organizations. While ISIS despises Shiites and continuously works against them and kills them whenever possible, Hamas has been cooperating with Iran for years as it wishes to take advantage of Iran’s similar desire to eliminate Israel. This is despite the fact that Iran is a Shiite country and Hamas is a Sunni organization with roots in the Muslim Brotherhood. In an ongoing process, Hamas’s cooperation with Iranian Shiites has considerably sped up its military buildup. Their fight against the common enemy, Israel, is deemed a sufficient reason for such otherwise unlikely cooperation.

When we analyze the intentions and capabilities of Hamas, particularly in the weeks since October 7, we can see a great deal of similarity to ISIS. The main points of similarity are: extreme Islamist ideology, intelligent use of media for psychological warfare and propaganda, brutal violence against “infidels”, a proud display of atrocities without any concealment, and a rigid and oppressive attitude towards anyone who does not participate in their fundamentalist version of Islam and does not engage in “righteous” jihad. The two terrorist organizations have much in common based on their similar radical ideological ambitions: erasing “infidels” from the world and ruling over an Islamic political-social order.

From the point of view of the State of Israel, it is important to understand that Hamas is not a partner in any way but an enemy that understands only power and knows no compromise. Hamas is pursuing the goal that was formulated in its original charter (1988) and in its political document (2017) without any change to

its doctrine. Therefore, the Jewish state has no choice but to protect its sovereignty, population, and territory, using its military, human and technological strength. As of today, Israel enjoys broad legitimacy in the international arena. It must continue to advance its tactical and strategic goal of the elimination of the terrorist organization Hamas. Both at home and on the international stages, it is important to promote the clear message: **Hamas equals ISIS.**

*Dr. Galit Truman-Zinman teaches at the School of Political Science and the Academic Excellence Unit at the University of Haifa. Her areas of interest include the study of violent conflicts, ethnic and religious nationalism, and Islamic terrorist organizations.*