



Educator's Guide

What is Hamas?

Hamas – this terrorist group was behind a wave of devastating suicide bombings and other activities in the 1990s and 2000s. More recently, the group has launched thousands of rockets at Israel, dug attack tunnels and served as the inspiration for countless lone-wolf attacks upon Israeli soldiers and civilians. What is Hamas? How did the group get started? What's its connection with Fatah? How did this terrorist organization end up ruling the whole of the Gaza Strip? And, why did Israel originally support a group whose main aim is to destroy it?

Further Reading

- 1.** Daniel Gordis, *Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn*, chapter 16
- 2.** Haaretz and DPA, “The Bloody Hamas-Fatah Power Struggle That Threatens to Return Following Gaza Assassination Attempt”
<https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/the-bloody-hamas-fatah-power-struggle-that-threatens-to-reignite-1.5054803>
- 3.** <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/background-and-overview-of-hamas>
- 4.** <https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/hamas/>
- 5.** Primary source – Hamas charter
<https://israeled.org/resources/documents/hamas-charter-islamic-resistance-movement-palestine/>

Review - Did the students understand the material?

- 1.** What does Hamas describe as their primary goal?
- 2.** What are the differences between Hamas and Fatah?



3. What region does Hamas currently control?
 - a. The West Bank
 - b. Gaza
 - c. Golan Heights
 - d. East Jerusalem
4. Describe Hamas's role in the first and second Intifadas.

Discussion Questions

1. In 2009, Andrew Higgins wrote an article for the Wall Street Journal, titled, How Israel Helped to Spawn Hamas. Israel initially supported Sheik Ahmed Yassin and endorsed the establishment of the Islamic University of Gaza, which is now associated with militancy. One primary reason for this decision by Israel was that Israel's main army at the time was Fatah, and Israel thought it might be able to help bring it down with Hamas. Looking back at this, do you think that Israel made the right decision to support Hamas in its early years? Should the Israeli government bear some responsibility for this decision or should the responsibility lay squarely with Hamas and Fatah?
2. For many, peace between Israel and the Palestinians is the number one goal. For others, peace is a pipe dream and an impossibility with a movement like Hamas, whose charter is more than anti-Israel, it is blatantly anti-Semitic. Those people would prefer a "divorce" to peace. Where do you stand on this dispute? Do you see peace as possible between Israel and Hamas or do you prefer a divorce?
3. In addition to having a military wing and being Islamist, Hamas also provides social services within Gaza. Some people say this is out of a sincere Muslim commitment to helping others through the principle of Zakat, while others claim that the social services they provide are for optics purposes alone, in order to gain followers and supporters of their vision for the destruction of Israel. Where do you fall on this dispute?



Reflection Questions

- 1.** Micah Goodman writes in *Catch 67*, “In the Palestinians’ narrative, they are the victims of Israel. In the Israelis’ narrative, they are the victims of the Palestinians. In this conflict, each side is the victim of its own victims.” The challenge is that if one sees oneself as a victim, it becomes psychologically nearly impossible to show empathy to one’s aggressor. Goodman suggests that the conversation between Jews and Palestinians can be healed through religion. What does he mean by that and why might religion be an important place to turn in order to solve this seemingly intractable situation?
- 2.** Imagine if your home country had Hamas for a next-door neighbor. What might that look like? How would your government and citizens respond?
- 3.** Professor Mohammed Dajani Daoudi has diagnosed “violent extremism as a disease and its side effects as empathy deficiency.” He notes that “too many people are ailing from this malady today in Palestine and Israel.” What are some ways it is possible to recognize the humanity in the other side? When does humanizing the other become too taxing to actually implement?