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Hamas

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Hamas

In Mark Juergensmeyer and Wade Clark Roof (Eds.). *Encyclopedia of Global Religion* (Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage Publications, 2012).

Hamas, Arabic for zeal and acronym of the *harakat al-muqâwamah al-islâmiyah* (Islamic Resistance Movement), is the largest Palestinian Islamic (Sunni) resistance movement. While pursuing its main political objective - the establishment of a State based on the principles of Islamic Law (or Shari'a) on all of pre-1948 Palestine- Hamas has resocialised the Palestinian public under Israeli occupation around an Islamic identity. Hamas' political, social and religious objectives are enshrined both in nationalistic and Islamic ideologies. These color the type of actions the movement promotes: *jihad* (or religious struggle) against Zionism and Israel, martyrdom as death for the sake of God, but also mundane involvement in party politics and the provision of welfare and charitable services to the Palestinian public. Hamas first appeared under that name in the Gaza Strip at the beginning of the First Intifada (1987). Its founder, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, a long-time member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, called for military actions against Israel therefore breaking away from the traditional involvement of the West Bank branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in religious affairs, social work and welfare. During the first Palestinian uprising (or Intifada) against Israeli occupation (1987-1993), Hamas members carried out several attacks against Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel, and against Israeli military and civilian targets. The movement's recourse to violence led the Israeli authorities to arrest and imprison Ahmed Yassin in 1989. Hamas rejected the 1993 Oslo Peace Agreements signed between Israel and the P.L.O., the Palestine Liberation Organisation. Hamas however offered the Israelis a truce against their withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the following years, Hamas claimed several dozen suicide attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians both inside the Occupied Territories and Israel proper. Attacks multiplied after the outbreak of the Second Intifada (2000). Although Israel, the USA and the Council of the European Union, amongst others, list Hamas as a terrorist organisation, several analysts have argued that the initial development of the movement was indirectly supported by the leaders of the Israeli right-wing Likud party in an attempt to sabotage the Oslo process and to weaken Fatah, the mainstream Palestinian movement led by Yasser Arafat. Ahmed Yassin, between his release from prison in 1997 and his assassination in 2004 by the Israeli military, resumed his role as the movement's spiritual leader, repeatedly calling for armed resistance against the 'Zionist entity' and justifying suicide attacks - including by women as of 2002 - on religious grounds. As of 2005, Hamas shifted strategy towards more involvement in party politics and won a majority of seats in the 2006 Palestinian Parliamentary elections. This electoral victory precipitated a halt of international aid to the Palestinian Authority and heightened political and military tensions between Hamas and Fatah, especially in the Gaza Strip.

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See also Palestine, Islam, Islamism, Jihad, Muslim Brotherhood, Terrorism.

Further readings:

Levitt, M. (2006). *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.