

HAMAS

- A Background

September 2025

INTRODUCTION

This bulletin offers a comprehensive overview of Hamas, charting its evolution from its founding roots to its current role in Palestinian political and social life. It explores the movement's history, ideological foundations, organizational structure, and leadership. The bulletin also provides essential background on Hamas's political positions and strategies, its longstanding rivalry with Fatah, and the intermittent efforts toward reconciliation between the two factions. In addition, it examines Hamas's participation in Palestinian elections, key turning points in its development, and its governance of the Gaza Strip since 2007. By presenting this information in a clear and accessible format, the bulletin aims to serve as a reliable reference for those seeking to better understand one of the most influential and controversial actors in the Palestinian political landscape.

FOUNDATION OF HAMAS AND THE FIRST INTIFADA, 1987-1992

Hamas, an acronym for *Harakat Al-Muqāwama Al-Islāmiyya* (Islamic Resistance Movement), was founded during the First Intifada which began in December 1987. It is a Sunni-Islamic organization that has its roots in Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, which had been active in the Gaza Strip since the 1950s.

Hamas was formally launched in January 1988 by Palestinian Islamic scholar Ahmad Yassin, Abdul Aziz Al-Rantisi, and Mohammed Taha. As the Intifada empowered local activists due to increasing disillusionment with the Palestinian leadership, particularly the PLO, it created space for more religiously-motivated groups to emerge as a distinct alternative. Hamas capitalized on this momentum, positioned itself as an ideologically and politically different actor and gained popular support, not least through its community and charity work, including running schools and clinics.

Contents:

Introduction	1
Foundation of Hamas and the First Intifada, 1987-1992	1
The Oslo Years, 1993-1999	5
The Second Intifada, 2000-2005	6
The 2006 PLC Elections and its Aftermath	8
Hamas's Takeover of Gaza, 2007	13
Key Hamas-Fatah Reconciliation Meetings (2007-2024)	16
Major Israel-Gaza Wars and Operations Since the Hamas Election Victory 2006.....	19

At this stage, the PLO did not view Hamas as a significant competitor and Israel discreetly supported the movement as a counterbalance to the PLO.¹ As early as 1 June 1988, Hamas leaders Mahmoud Al-Zahhar and Ibrahim Al-Yazuri even traveled from Gaza to Tel Aviv to meet with then Israeli Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin to present a plan to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.²

Initially, Hamas cooperated with other Palestinian factions and refrained from armed attacks, but as its role in Palestinian politics increased and it published its Charter (“The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement”) on 18 August 1988, calling for the establishment of an Islamic state in all of historic Palestine, defining “jihad” as a central duty for Muslims in reclaiming Palestine, and viewing the land as a waqf (Islamic endowment), thus rejecting political solutions or compromise with Israel, its influence grew further.³ It subsequently played a significant military role during the First Intifada through violent resistance against the Israeli occupation.

In December 1992, after six Israeli security forces were killed, including Nissim Toledano, who had been kidnapped by Hamas, Israel arrested some 1,600 Palestinians, mostly Hamas supporters, and ordered the deportation of 400 of them to southern Lebanon.⁴

Political Structure of Hamas

Shura Council (or parliament): Formally the highest political authority of Hamas in Gaza and the movement’s consultative body. It is based on the Islamic concept of consultation and popular assembly (shura). Its members are elected from the four regional shuras in Gaza, the West Bank, the Diaspora, and by prisoners in Israeli jails. Their exact numbers and names are kept secret. Each regional shura appoints a leadership for its region. Current Chairman of the Shura Council is Mohammad Ismail Darwish.

Politburo (or executive committee): Main decision-making body, elected by the Shura Council and determines Hamas’s policies in consultation with it. The main politburo comprises 15 members elected by the Shura Council every four years. In May 2017, Ismail Haniyeh was elected as chairman, replacing Khaled Mashaal. Following Haniyeh’s assassination by Israel in July 2024, the Shura Council chose Yahya Sinwar as successor. After he was also killed by Israel in October 2024, a temporary “collective leadership” was set up to reduce the impact of potential future assassinations. It has 5 members: the head of Shura Council, Muhammad Darwish; the leaders of three regional politburos: Khaled Mashaal (Diaspora), Khalil Al-Hayya (Gaza), and Zaher Jabareen (West Bank); and the secretary-general of the Politburo, Nizar Awadallah.* Until January 2012, the politburo was based in Damascus and has since relocated to Qatar.

* https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_palestinian_politics/politburo/

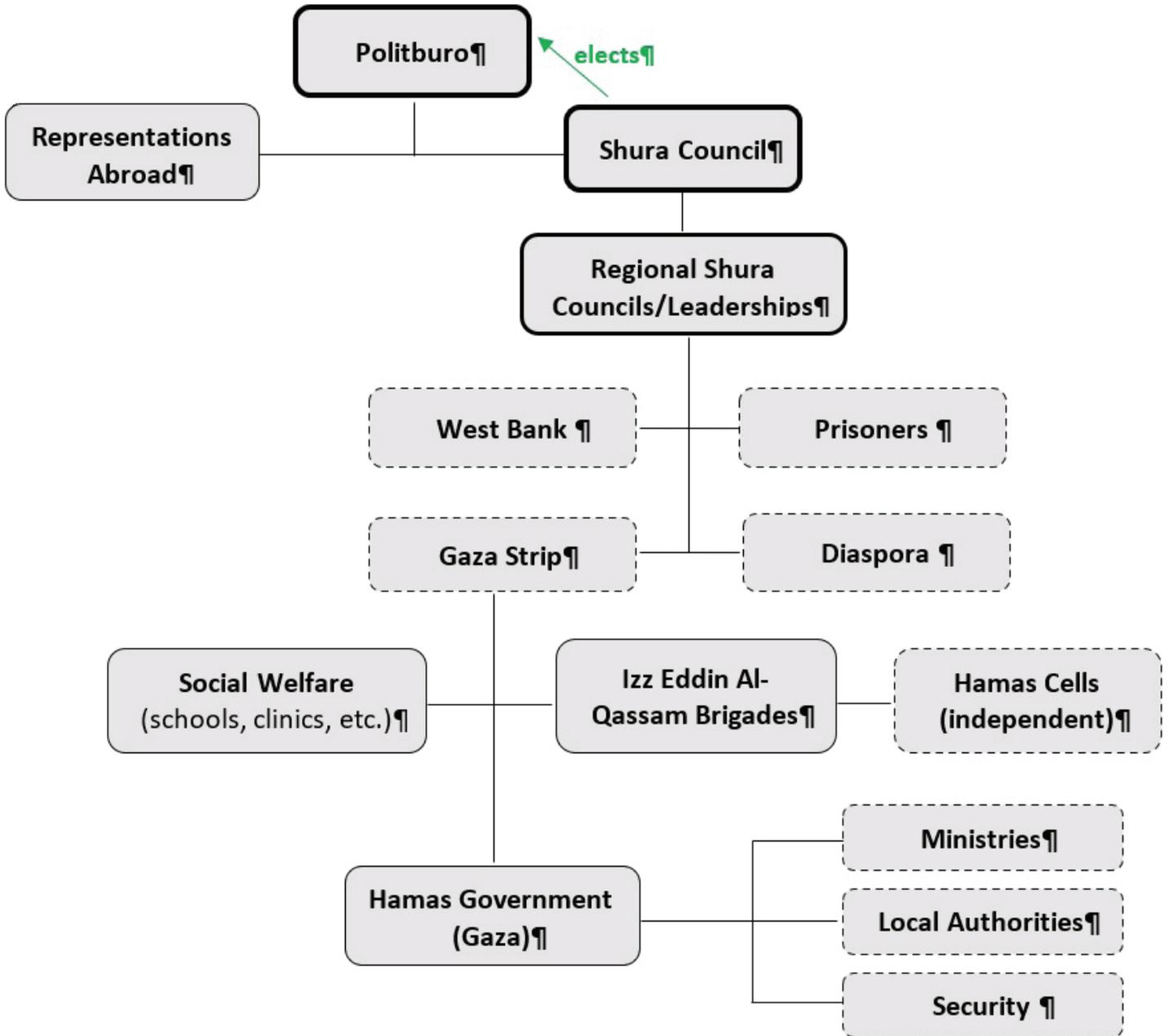
1 E.g., Oren, Michael (2021), “How Gaza Became Israel’s Unsolvably Problem”, Mosaic, 7 June 2021; <https://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/israel-zionism/2021/06/how-gaza-became-israels-unsolvable-problem/>.

2 Accordingly, Israel had to declare its intention to withdraw from the Occupied Territories and then transfer authority to a neutral party (e.g., UN, the European Common Market, the Arab League, or the Organization of African Unity). Israel also had to release Palestinian detainees and allow the Palestinians to name their own representatives. Then Israel and the Palestinians would negotiate final status issues. Abu Amr, Ziad (1994), *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza, Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad*, Indiana University Press, p. 76.

3 Ahmad, Hisham (1994), *From Religious Salvation to Political Transformation: The Rise of Hamas in Palestinian Society*, Jerusalem: PASSIA.

4 In February 1993, Israel agreed with the US to shorten the deportation period and allow their return; https://www.btselem.org/deportation/1992_mass_deportation.

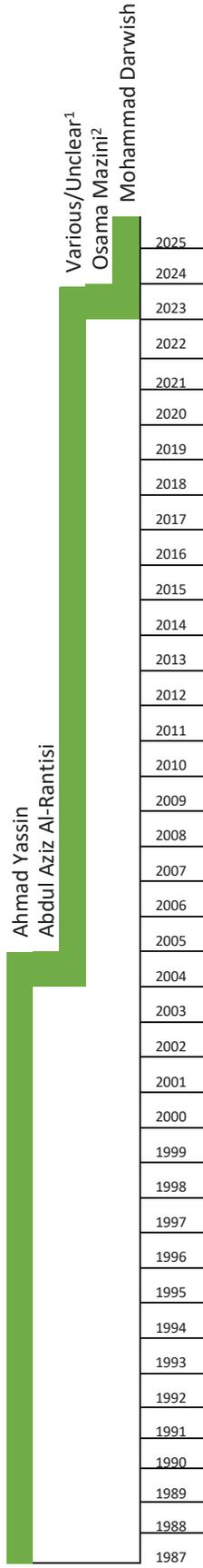
Hamis Organizational Structure



Hamas Leadership over Time

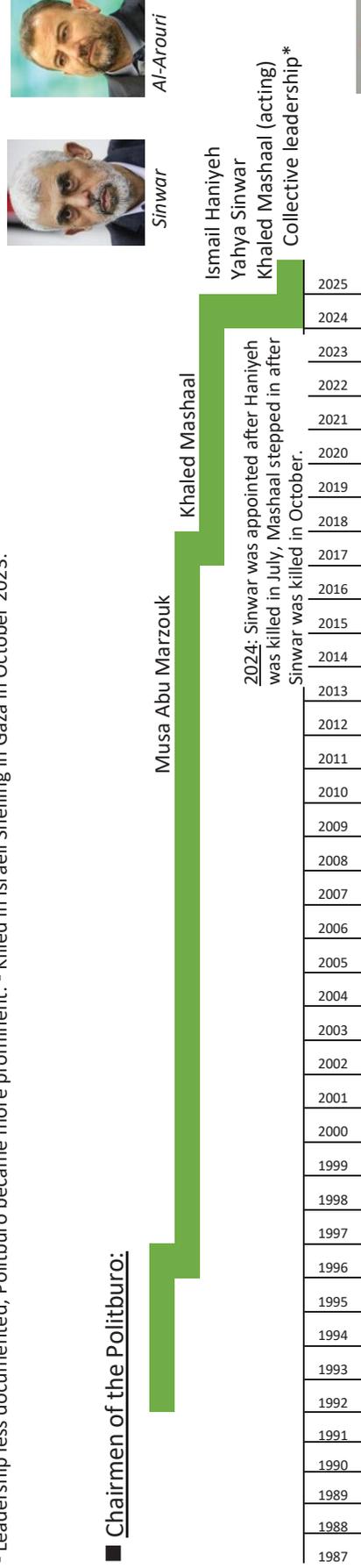


■ Head of Shura Council



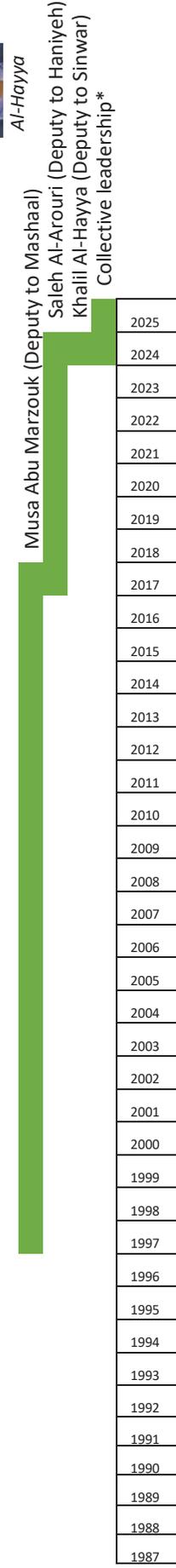
¹ Leadership less documented; Politburo became more prominent. ² Killed in Israeli Shelling in Gaza in October 2023.

■ Chairmen of the Politburo:



* 2024: Sinwar was appointed after Haniyeh was killed in July, Mashaal stepped in after Sinwar was killed in October.

■ Deputy Chairmen of the Politburo:



* After the assassination of two leaders a temporary leadership council of five was appointed: the head of Shura Council, Mohammad Darwish; the leaders of three regional politburos: Khaled Mashaal (External); Khalil Al-Hayya (Gaza); and Zaher Jabareen (West Bank); and Nizar Awadallah, the secretary-general of the Politburo.

THE OSLO YEARS, 1993-1999

The Oslo Accords marked a turning point. The PLO, under Yasser Arafat, recognized Israel and established the Palestinian Authority (PA). Hamas strongly opposed this, arguing that it violated international law and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and undermined their cause.⁵ They rejected the recognition of the state of Israel, the *de facto* acceptance of the settlements, the deferral of the right of return for refugees, and the PA's security cooperation with the Israeli army.⁶ Considering the agreements a treason to Islam⁷ and a Western plot, Hamas remained committed to armed struggle as a legitimate means of liberation. Accordingly, violence accompanied the Oslo Process almost from its start. Hamas' first suicide bombing inside Israel was carried out in April **1994** on a bus in Afula, in reprisal for the killing of 29 worshippers in Hebron's Al-Ibrahimi Mosque by an Israeli settler two months earlier.⁸ Nevertheless, already in 1993, Hamas showed some willingness to compromise and agree to a long-term cease-fire with Israel if it would withdraw from the occupied territories,⁹ and as early as 1994, it mulled over participating in legislative elections.¹⁰

After the Oslo II Accord was signed in September **1995**, the PA under Yasser Arafat came under increased pressure to suppress Hamas activities, while Hamas accused the PA of compromising on core Palestinian national goals. Several major suicide bombings were met with increased Israeli targeted arrests and assassinations of Hamas operatives, which in turn provoked more attacks (such as the killing of Hamas' chief bombmaker Yahya Ayyash in January 1996).

After the January **1996** elections for the PA Presidency and a Legislative Council (PLC), which Hamas boycotted, the PA became increasingly authoritarian, cracking down on opponents, especially from Hamas. However, it also faced increasing criticism for corruption and its failure to achieve results through talks with Israel, which was a fertile ground for Hamas to gain more popularity. In May 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu won the Israeli elections and adopted a tougher stance towards Hamas and the Oslo Accords.

In **1997**, Hamas continued to reorganize underground, but its military capabilities were somewhat limited by PA crackdowns and Israeli countermeasures. On 25 September 1997, Mossad agents attempted to assassinate Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal in Amman by poisoning him. However, they were caught by Jordanian authorities, causing a diplomatic fallout which ended with Israel providing the antidote. As part of the deal to release the Mossad agents, Israel released Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmad Yassin from prison in October 1997,¹¹ which in turn boosted Hamas' popularity in Palestinian society.

In the later 1990s, Hamas was relatively less active militarily than during earlier years but remained subjected to Israeli crackdowns. It denounced the Wye River Agreement of October **1998** and increased its efforts to portray the PLO/PA as collaborators. Relations with the PA were further strained as the latter – under US and Israeli pressure to combat “terrorist organizations” – intensified arrests and surveillance of Hamas members. Another significant development was a major policy shift in Jordan, where King Abdullah II closed Hamas' political office and expelled several of its leaders to Qatar in November **1999**.¹² That same year, Hamas leaders showed some pragmatism: Abdul Aziz Al-Rantisi hinted that Hamas would be willing to recognize the state of Israel if Israel were to accept a Palestinian state, and Ismail Abu Shanab stated that, “Hamas is focusing on an agenda for Israel's withdrawal from the lands taken in 1967, the establishment of a Palestinian state and a solution for the refugees ... The new Palestine can have good relations with Israel.”¹³

5 “Doctrine of Hamas,” Wilson Center, October 20, 2023.

6 Gilani, M. (2024), “The Oslo Process: The Façade of Peace between Palestine and Israel,” <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/106340>.

7 Hamas viewed the land of historical Palestine as Islamic *waqf*, meaning it could never be surrendered or negotiated away. Treaties that allow non-Muslim rule over Muslim lands are forbidden and Muslims have a duty to resist and reclaim Palestine.

8 PASSIA, *100 Years of Palestinian History*.

9 Kristiansen, Wendy, “Challenge and Counterchallenge: Hamas response to Oslo,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 1999.

10 With Sheikh Yasin writing from prison that Hamas should be “challenging the legislative institution from within by participating in the electoral process ... for ... an autonomous Palestinian Council.” *Ibid*.

11 Schmemmann, S., “Israel Frees Ailing Hamas Founder to Jordan at Hussein's Request,” *The New York Times*, 1 October 1997; <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/10/01/world/israel-frees-ailing-hamas-founder-to-jordan-at-hussein-s-request.html>.

12 Hirst, D., “Jordan curbs Hamas,” *The Guardian*, 22 November 1999; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/nov/22/israel>.

13 Gaess, Roger, “Interviews from Gaza: What Hamas wants,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 19, No. 4, December 2002.

THE SECOND INTIFADA, 2000-2005

With the failure of the July **2000** Camp David Summit between Israel and the PLO (which Hamas had opposed) and the provocative visit of Ariel Sharon to Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Ash-Sharif, a new wave of violence erupted, marking the beginning of the Second Intifada. Tensions between the PA and Hamas grew as the PLO's waning influence stood in contrast to Hamas's rising popularity due to both its charity work and its resisting the occupation. In **2001**, Israel stepped up its "targeted killings" of Hamas leaders; Hamas also increased its suicide bombings and opposed any US-brokered ceasefires or peace initiatives, such as the Mitchell Report in December.

A major suicide bombing in March **2002** triggered Israel's "Operation Defensive Shield" – the largest West Bank operation since 1967, which targeted "terrorist infrastructure" with massive Israeli incursions into West Bank cities and laying siege to the Muqata'a, President Arafat's PA headquarters in Ramallah. Despite the violence, the summer and fall of 2002 saw notable cooperation between Hamas and Fatah with reports about an understanding that Hamas would join a "collective leadership" outside the PA.¹⁴ Following a meeting in Cairo,¹⁵ Mahmoud Al-Zahhar stated that a joint secretariat as well as an action program and meetings schedule had been established.¹⁶ The Hamas leader also appeared to become increasingly willing to compromise regarding Israel. Ismail Abu Shanab remarked that "an Islamic state is compatible with democracy. In this way, we see the Israelis as part of this community if they want to live as equals," and Sheikh Yassin stated: "my own best vision for Palestine is of a land for Christians, Jews, Muslims - a state where everyone has equal rights."¹⁷

In June **2003**, Hamas agreed to a temporary truce (*hudna*) with other factions, which was brokered by the PA but quickly collapsed. Israel then intensified targeting of Hamas political figures, killing Ismail Abu Shanab in August. Despite (or because of) the violence, Hamas's popularity grew relative to the PA, which was accused of failing to protect Hamas members from Israeli raids.

Things further escalated on 22 March **2004**, when Israel assassinated Hamas founder and spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, and less than a month later on 17 April, Abdul Aziz Al-Rantisi who had replaced him in Gaza (while Khaled Mashaal had become Hamas' overall leader).¹⁸ On 25 April, Mahmoud Al-Zahhar was named the new political leader of Hamas in Gaza and Ismail Haniyeh his deputy. Emerging from this period with enhanced militant credibility and a strengthened political base, Hamas was poised for electoral success. It boycotted the 2005 presidential elections, because the post of president was created under agreements with Israel, but participated in the municipal elections, winning in the first round in December 2004 a majority in 13 municipalities, compared to Fatah's 10.

In January **2005**, Mahmoud Abbas was elected as the new PA President following the death of President Yasser Arafat in November 2004. Later that month, Hamas secured another sweeping victory in municipal elections, winning seven local authorities compared to Fatah's three, and on 8 March 2005, it announced its decision to take part in the upcoming PLC elections.¹⁹

On **17 March 2005**, Hamas and representatives from 12 other factions adopted a declaration in Cairo, affirming, *inter alia*, commitment to national unity, institutional reforms, inclusive representation in the PLO, and opposition to Israeli actions such as construction of settlements, the separation barrier, and the Judaization of Jerusalem. They declared an open-ended but conditional truce with Israel – maintaining calm in exchange for Israel stopping

14 "Palestinian agreement set to bring Hamas into governing body," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, August 13, 2002.

15 "Palestinian paper reports meetings between EU, Hamas officials," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, October 15, 2002.

16 "Hamas leader confirms meeting with Palestinian minister, on Fatah dialogue," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, November 30, 2002.

17 Gaess, Roger, "Interviews from Gaza: What Hamas wants," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 19, No. 4, December 2002.

18 In January 2004, Yassin had proposed an end to armed resistance and a "temporary peace" with Israel in exchange for a Palestinian state and leaving restoring Palestinians' "historical rights ... for future generations." "Running out of Time," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, January 29-February 4, 2004. And Al-Rantisi had offered a 10-year truce (*hudna*) for Israeli withdrawal to 1967 borders. "Hamas Proposes 10-year Truce for Israeli Pullback," *Haaretz*, 26 January 2004.

19 Usher, Graham "The New Hamas", *MERIP*, 21 August 2005; <https://merip.org/2005/08/the-new-hamas/>.

attacks and releasing prisoners.²⁰ However, soon after Hamas vowed that “Our fingers will remain on the rifle triggers until the removal of the occupation.”²¹

In the 5 May 2005 round of municipal elections, Fatah came out on top, but was beaten in four out of five major cities by Hamas, which claimed that also many of the winning independents belonged to them.²² Later in May, Egyptian mediators tried to solve a crisis between Fatah and Hamas over alleged irregularities in the elections.

Throughout July, President Abbas tried to set up a national unity government before the Israeli pullout from Gaza, but Hamas (and Islamic Jihad) rejected, and there were repeated armed clashes between Fatah and Hamas in Gaza. In **August 2005**, as part of Ariel Sharon’s disengagement plan, all settlers were evacuated from Gaza and four settlements in the northern West Bank. Hamas had opposed the plan as unilateral, but claimed it as a victory for armed resistance.

First Palestinian Municipal Elections, 2004-2005 (%)

	Locations voting	Fatah	Hamas	Others*
<u>First Round</u> 23 Dec. 2004 27 Jan. 2005	26 West Bank municipalities	38%	35%	27%
	10 towns in Gaza	22%	65%	13%
<u>Second Round</u> 5 May 2005	82 municipalities WB: 76 GS: 6	44% 64%	36% 28%	20% 8%
<u>Third Round</u> 29 Sept. 2005	104 West Bank municipalities	53%	26%	21%
<u>Fourth Round</u> 15 Dec. 2005	40 municipalities (WB: 37; GS: 3) 4 large cities Surrounding locations	13% 35%	74% 26%	13% 39%

* Independents, joint list, coalitions. *Source:* CEC; Pina, Aaron D., *Palestinian Elections*, Congressional Research Service - Report for Congress, 9 February 2006; <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/RL33269.pdf>.

In **September 2005**, Hamas leader in Nablus, Mohammed Ghazal, stated that “The Charter is not the Qur’an,” and that Hamas could one day amend its Charter and hold negotiations with Israel, saying, “Historically, we believe all Palestine belongs to Palestinians, but we’re talking now about reality, about political solutions...” and that “The idea of negotiating is not something problematic and is not a dogma.” In Gaza, however, Hamas’s Mahmoud Al-Zahhar said Israel could not be recognized as “the legal owner of any part of Palestine,” and that the Charter could only be changed after discussions with the people.”²³

20 https://ecf.org.il/media_items/1202.

21 “Hamas: We’ll Keep Our Weapons Until the End of the Occupation,” *Haaretz*, 25 April 2005.

22 <https://www.elections.ps/tabid/168/language/en-US/Default.aspx>.

23 “Hamas Leader Says Charter Is Not Koran; Group Could One Day Recognize Israel,” *Haaretz*, 22 September 2005.

In **December 2005**, the fourth round of municipal elections saw Fatah mainly winning in smaller villages and Hamas in larger towns; Fatah won 35% of the seats, Hamas 56% (the rest went to smaller parties and independents). A fifth round for the remaining 65 municipalities in the West Bank and several others in Gaza did not take place because of Fatah's political fear of further Hamas victories.²⁴

In the run-up to the second PLC elections, tensions and international concerns were mounting. As early as June 2005, as polls began to show significant Hamas gains, Israel and the US considered pressuring President Mahmoud Abbas to ban Hamas from participating in the elections.²⁵ Yet, on **14 December 2005**, Hamas formally announced its electoral list, with Ismail Haniyeh leading the ticket. In response, Israel implemented measures to restrict the movement of Hamas officials to prevent them from campaigning effectively.²⁶ Both Israel and American officials expressed alarm at the prospect of a Hamas victory, with the latter now openly calling for the group to be barred from running.²⁷ However, the PA maintained that elections were a democratic right and that no party would be excluded.

On **17 December**, the US Congress passed a resolution – by a vote of 397 to 17 – stating “terrorist organizations such as Hamas should not be permitted to participate in Palestinian elections until such organizations recognize Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state, cease incitement, condemn terrorism, and permanently disarm and dismantle their terrorist infrastructure.”²⁸ The EU also indicated that a Hamas win would necessitate a re-evaluation of its relations with the Palestinians²⁹ and could lead to a reduction in aid.³⁰ For its part, Hamas said it would continue its resistance as long as the occupation persisted,³¹ though it also showed readiness to talk to Israel through a third party.³²

Israeli officials were split on how to respond to Hamas’ participation in the elections. Some were open to talks if Hamas disarmed and recognized Israel’s right to exist,³³ while others rejected any engagement with a Palestinian government that included Hamas members.³⁴ On **10 January 2006**, Hamas released its official elections platform, calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, favoring armed struggle but without calling for Israel’s destruction, and calling the right of return “an inalienable right about which no political concessions should be made.”³⁵

THE 2006 PLC ELECTIONS AND ITS AFTERMATH

On **25 January 2006**, the second ever PLC elections were held; four days later, the CEC announced the final results: Hamas won 74 seats of the 132 seats, and Fatah 45,³⁶ marking Hamas’ transition from an opposition movement to a governing party. Hamas invited other factions, including Fatah, to join a national coalition government.³⁷ While Fatah initially acknowledged the results and pledged cooperation³⁸, though ruling out to join a Hamas government,³⁹ tensions quickly escalated into clashes between Fatah loyalists and Hamas supporters.

Palestinian analysts attributed the election outcome to Fatah’s corruption, Israeli policies, and a stalled peace process, and warned that the Hamas win could lead to international isolation.⁴⁰

24 “More Than Million Palestinians Live in Hamas-controlled Areas,” *Haaretz*, 18 December 2005.

25 E.g., <https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/475>.

26 E.g., <https://imemc.org/article/14867/>.

27 “Hamas to Run for PLC Despite U.S. Call,” *Haaretz*, 18 December 2005; “Fatah Rules Out Coalition with Hamas,” *Arab News*, 13 January 2006, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/279316>.

28 <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-109hres575ih/xml/BILLS-109hres575ih.xml>.

29 <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-196703/>.

30 <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/hamas-win-could-jeopardize-eu-aid-to-pa>.

31 “Hamas to Run for PLC Despite U.S. Call,” *Haaretz*, 18 December 2005.

32 “Hamas leader: Negotiations ‘not taboo,’” *Jerusalem Post*, 23 January 2006; <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/hamas-leader-negotiations-not-taboo>.

33 E.g., <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-196703/>.

34 E.g., <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna11009552>.

35 “Hamas Platform Mentions Armed Struggle, but Not Israel’s Destruction,” *Haaretz*, 11 January 2006.

36 https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/palestine2006-ndi-final.pdf.

37 Usher, Graham, “Hamas Risen,” *MERIP*, Spring 2006; <https://merip.org/2006/03/hamas-risen/>.

38 “Abbas: Peace talks - even with Hamas,” *YNET*, 25 January 2006; <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3206159,00.html>.

39 <https://english.eastday.com/eastday/englishedition/node20665/node20669/node22812/node114260/node114262/userobject1ai1818856.html>.

40 “Hamas wins Huge Majority,” *Al Jazeera*, 26 January 2006; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2006/1/26/hamas-wins-huge-majority>.

Reactions to Hamas' 2006 election victory varied significantly:

- **Hamas** stressed that it wants a partnership with other Palestinian factions, called for opening the door for dialogue, but insisted it would not recognize Israel as long as the occupation persisted. Two days after the elections, Hamas leader Mahmoud Al-Zahhar offered a potential long-term truce (*hudna*) with Israel, contingent on a full withdrawal to 1967 borders, prisoner releases, and a Gaza-West Bank link.⁴¹
- **Fatah** said that it would not join a Hamas-led government unless it recognizes peace agreements with Israel and drops fundamentalist elements from its political program. On 28 January 2006, President Abbas asserted control over the security forces, declaring them accountable to him – not the incoming Hamas government – which Hamas rejected.
- **Israel** refused to negotiate with Hamas, labeled it a terrorist organization, and imposed economic sanctions, including halting the transfer of tax revenues to the PA, banning entry of Gazan workers into Israel, and restricting Gaza-West Bank movement.⁴² It tried to delegitimize the new government by urging donors to reroute aid, and threatened to sever ties with the PA if Hamas affiliates assumed key roles.⁴³ Hamas's prime minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh was even mentioned as a potential assassination target if attacks resumed.⁴⁴ However, there were also other voices; Israeli Central Bank Governor Stanley Fischer said that a Hamas government would not necessarily mean a return to violence, as Hamas has largely honored a ceasefire over the past year, and that economic relations – entry of Palestinian workers and trade as well as financial transfers to the PA – should continue as long as the security situation permitted.⁴⁵
- **Regionally**, there were mixed responses. Some countries (e.g., Qatar, Syria and Iran) expressed support and offered aid, while others (e.g., Egypt and Jordan) were cautious or concerned, fearing Hamas' ties to Islamist movements in their own countries. Most countries in the region said that the Palestinian people's choice should be respected and Hamas should be given a chance, but it should accept the signed agreements with Israel and renounce violence. They also warned that suspending funds would make the people suffer, not Hamas.
- **Internationally**, reactions were largely negative in the West. While the Quartet praised the fair elections, it boycotted the Hamas government, demanding that it renounce violence, recognize Israel, and accept past agreements.⁴⁶ Hamas dismissed these conditions as Western blackmail, stating that "the Quartet should have demanded an end to the occupation and aggression" rather than demanding "that the victim should recognize the occupation and stand handcuffed in the face of the aggression."⁴⁷ The EU and US first suspended aid to the PA, then redirected it through President Abbas/Fatah. Others, such as Russia and South Africa were more open to dialogue, inviting Hamas leaders for talks.

On 4 February 2006, President Abbas met with Hamas leaders to begin talks on the new PA Cabinet. Much to Hamas' displeasure, the outgoing PLC expanded at its final session on 13 February 2006 the powers of the President, allowing him to appoint judges and dissolve parliament at any time.⁴⁸ On 18 February 2006, Hamas took over as the dominant party in the PLC and named Ismail Haniyeh as prime minister; Abdul Aziz Dweik was elected PLC Speaker. President Abbas demanded that the government honors all agreements signed by the PA and continues working towards a negotiated peace agreement, while urging the international community and Israel not to "punish" voters for their choice.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Israel launched a series of economic sanctions against Hamas the next day, saying the PA had become "a terrorist authority."⁵⁰ On 21 February 2006, President

41 "Hamas leader sets conditions for truce," CNN, 29 January 2006; <https://edition.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/01/29/hamas.interview/>.

42 <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/20/world/middleeast/israel-suspends-tax-money-flow-to-palestinians.html>; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2006/2/19/israel-imposes-sanctions-on-pa>.

43 <https://www.thedailystar.net/2006/02/16/d60216130697.htm>.

44 <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna11706947>.

45 <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-203280/>.

46 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/declarations/88201.pdf.

47 https://nointervention.com/archive/news/islamonline/20060131_article02.html.

48 https://pchgaza.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/ann_rep_06-en.pdf.

49 <https://pij.org/articles/419>.

50 <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/cabinet-communique-19-feb-2006>.

Abbas officially appointed Ismail Haniyeh as prime minister and asked him to form the new government. A day later, Azzam Al-Ahmad, head of the Fatah faction in the new PLC, said Fatah was not principally against joining a Hamas government if they agreed on domestic and foreign affairs, including negotiating peace with Israel.⁵¹

The first PLC session opened on 6 March 2006 simultaneously in Ramallah and Gaza City (by video conference); it turned chaotic when Fatah members walked out after Hamas repealed a series of measures passed by the outgoing PLC.⁵² However, talks on forming a coalition government resumed the next day. On 10 March 2006, Hamas submitted its proposed platform to President Abbas; it called armed resistance a legal right and a method of achieving Palestinian rights. Regarding past agreements with Israel it stated: "It is the right of the new Cabinet to reconsider these accords on the basis of respecting international law and to implement them in order to protect the rights and interests of our Palestinian people." It added that Hamas would "consider a mechanism for negotiations" if Israel recognized the Palestinian people's national rights and withdrew from the OPT.⁵³

After failing to reach an agreement with other parties, Hamas announced on 16 March that it would form a government by itself,⁵⁴ and on 19 March, Haniyeh presented his 24-member cabinet to President Abbas.⁵⁵ On 22 March 2006, the PLO Executive Committee rejected Hamas' governing platform and demanded that it recognize Israel, the institutions of the PLO, and agreements with Israel. Hamas insisted that the PLO Executive Committee had no right to interfere in the formation of a government.⁵⁶ The next day, incoming PA Interior Minister Said Siyam vowed he would never order the arrest of a Palestinian for resisting the occupation.⁵⁷ However, designated Prime Minister Haniyeh named ending corruption and carrying out internal reforms as Hamas' top priorities – and not confrontation with Israel.⁵⁸ Along the same line, Israeli Chief of Staff Dan Halutz suggested that a Hamas government would not necessarily lead to more terror attacks as it "will want to prove that their image is unjustified" and thus "restrain themselves."⁵⁹

On 27 March 2006, Haniyeh presented his political program to the PLC, which vowed, *inter alia*, "to protect the right of our people in defending themselves in confronting the occupation and removing the settlements and the apartheid wall and to continue their struggle towards the establishment of the independent Palestinian state with full sovereignty with Jerusalem as its capital."⁶⁰ Designated Deputy Prime Minister Nasser Eddin Al-Sha'er stated that the government "does not reject coordination and cooperation to resolve routine problems with anyone, including Israel,"⁶¹ and PLC Speaker Abdul-Aziz Dweik said that Hamas would recognize Israel if it withdrew from the West Bank and East Jerusalem.⁶²

On 28 March, the PLC approved with a vote of 71:36 and two abstaining the new cabinet, which was sworn in by President Abbas the next day. Prime Minister Haniyeh reiterated Hamas preparedness to give negotiations a chance as long as they served the Palestinians' interest.⁶³ The same day, however, a car bomb killed a Hamas affiliate in Gaza; the funeral soon turned into an anti-Fatah and anti-Preventive Security protest, sparking the first outbreak of factional fighting.

In early April, Hamas appealed to the international community not to cut off aid to the PA, and Foreign Minister Al-Zahhar indicated for the first time in writing that Hamas may be willing to accept a two-state settlement in a

51 <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-203280/>.

52 "PLC Repeals Series of Laws, Appointments Introduced by Fatah," *Haaretz*, 7 March 2006.

53 "Hamas Platform Calls for Continued 'Armed Resistance'," *Haaretz*, 13 March 2006.

54 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2006/3/16/hamas-fails-to-reach-coalition-deal>.

55 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2006/3/20/hamas-submits-cabinet-list>.

56 <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/opt-hamas-course-govern-despite-plo-objections>.

57 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2006/3/23/hamas-to-shield-fighters>.

58 https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/middle_east-jan-june06-haniyeh.

59 "Halutz: Hamas Gov't May Not Boost Terror," *Haaretz*, 26 March 2006.

60 <https://www.palquest.org/en/historicext/13423/prime-minister-elect-ismail-haniyeh-presents-new-government%E2%80%99s-program-palestinian-legislative>.

61 <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2006/04/27/hamas-the-last-chance-for-peace/>.

62 <https://unispal.un.org/pdfs/E6CDC322FEAAA88F8525713B007B8CC6.pdf>.

63 <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/documents/doc2344.html>.

letter to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Israel formally severed all direct contact – including security coordination – with the Hamas-led PA on 9 April, and Acting Prime Minister Olmert announced a boycott of foreign diplomats who meet with members of the new PA government, which Hamas considered “a declaration of war”.⁶⁵

On 11 April, the Israeli Cabinet took the following decisions regarding the PA:

- “A. The PA is a terrorist authority that is hostile to Israel;
- B. The State of Israel, and all of its official representatives, will not hold ties with the PA and its elements;
- C. The PA is one authority; therefore, neither the PA Chairman nor his office will be treated any differently. However, there will be no personal disavowal of the PA Chairman;
- D. Foreign officials who are visiting the region and who meet with Hamas elements will not be received, during the same visit, for meetings with Israeli officials;
- E. Israel will coordinate with the international community regarding humanitarian assistance for the needs of the Palestinian population, not via the PA establishment;
- F. Subject to security considerations, the Gaza Strip crossings will be open in order to allow the entry of humanitarian assistance into the Gaza Strip.”⁶⁶

Meanwhile, the struggle for control of security in Gaza intensified amid Hamas plans to set up a shadow security force, and Fatah-led anti-Hamas protests continued in the West Bank, at times escalating to armed clashes. Hamas officials kept calling on the international community to reconsider their suspension of aid and to deal directly with its government, but in vain. In addition, Israeli banks were pressed to sever ties with banks operating in the Palestinian territories. Of the two largest Israeli banks with Palestinian ties, Bank Hapoalim on 4 April 2006 gave Palestinian banks a month’s notice to remove assets, and on 17 May the Israel Discount Bank said that ties would be frozen within three to six months.⁶⁷

Following the killing of two Hamas activists by Fatah members, the Hamas government, in defiance of a veto by President Abbas, deployed a new 3,000-strong security force in Gaza on 17 May, triggering renewed clashes between the two sides.⁶⁸ In the following weeks, Hamas repeatedly indicated its readiness to agree to an extended ceasefire/long-term truce if Israel withdrew to the 1967 lines.⁶⁹

In the context of a looming civil war, five Palestinians jailed in Israel, representing Fatah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), released the “Prisoners’ Document” (or National Reconciliation Document) on 11 May 2006, aimed at uniting the different factions. It called for the formation of a national unity government, the admission of Hamas and the PIJ into the PLO, and the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, thereby implicitly recognizing Israel.⁷⁰ The move was received with mixed reactions; most Palestinians supported it⁷¹ and the PLO approved of it, but when President Abbas threatened to hold a referendum should Hamas not endorse it, the Hamas and PIJ co-drafters retracted their names in protest. A fresh round of Hamas-Fatah fighting followed, but eventually a revised document was negotiated and signed by all factions on 28 June 2006, and Fatah and Hamas began negotiating on a unity government.

64 “Hamas official suggests ‘two-state’ solution,” *CNN*, 5 April 2006; <https://edition.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/04/04/mideast/index.html>.

65 “Hamas: Israel Severing Security Ties with PA Is ‘Declaration of War,’” *Haaretz*, 9 April 2006.

66 <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/govmes110406>.

67 International Crisis Group, *Palestinians, Israel, and the Quartet: Pulling Back from the Brink*, Middle East Report No. 54, 13 June 2006; “Discount Bank to sever ties with Palestinian banks in the territories,” *Haaretz*, 17 May 2006.

68 “Hamas puts 3,000-strong private army on streets of Gaza,” *The Guardian*, 18 May 2006; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/may/18/israel>.

69 Rubinstein, D., “Haniyeh Tells Haaretz: Withdrawal to 1967 Borders Will Lead to Peace,” *Haaretz*, 23 May 2006; Tuastad, Dag, *The Hudna: Hamas’s Concept of a Long-term Ceasefire*, PRIO Policy Brief 9, 2010; <https://www.prio.org/publications/7356>.

70 <https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/226>.

71 “Poll: 77 percent of Palestinians support the prisoners’ document,” *Haaretz*, 7 June 2006.

However, a few days earlier on 25 June, members of Hamas and other groups had kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit during an attack on an Israeli army outpost near the Gaza border. As part of the subsequent crackdown on Hamas, Israeli forces arrested dozens of Hamas' members in the West Bank, including ministers, PLC members, and the mayor of Qalqilya,⁷² and launched "Operation Summer Rains" in Gaza, destroying *inter alia* the Interior Ministry⁷³ and Gaza's power plant. In Jerusalem, Interior Minister Roni Bar-On revoked the Jerusalem residency status of four Hamas PLC members – Mohammed Abu Ter, Ahmad Attoun, Khaled Abu Arafef and Mahmoud Totah – for failing to resign from the government.⁷⁴ Hamas demanded the release of women and minor prisoners from Israeli jails in exchange for Shalit (who was only freed in 2011 – see below).

During July-August, the Gaza operation was overshadowed by Israel's 2006 Lebanon War against Hizbullah, and during August and September, Fatah and Hamas continued to negotiate on a national unity government to end internal feuding and international isolation. Hamas demanded to head such a government and that its jailed ministers and PLC members be released from Israeli prisons, while Fatah insisted that a joint political program must recognize Israel. By mid-September, Hamas signaled indirect recognition of Israel by adopting the Arab peace initiative as the basis for the new government's diplomatic platform and Haniyeh submitted the resignation of his government to President Abbas, who then asked him to form the new government involving all factions. Hamas' Ahmad Yousef said the unity government would recognize all agreements between Israel and the PLO if they did not contradict the rights of the Palestinians, and that resistance against Israel was legitimate as long as Israel continued its acts of oppression.⁷⁵ However, on 23 September 2006, Hamas said that it would not join a coalition that would recognize Israel, but was ready to back a 10-year truce.⁷⁶

October saw a sweeping civil service strike over unpaid salaries that turned particularly violent when Hamas forces tried to break up the protests, at the end of which nine people were killed and over 100 injured. In retaliation, Fatah supporters ransacked Hamas offices throughout the West Bank, including the Prime Minister's office and the Cabinet building in Ramallah. In the following weeks there was a constant back and forth of Hamas-Fatah clashes. Qatar attempted to help resolve their differences but Hamas rejected the demand to recognize Israel and renounce violence.⁷⁷ By November 2006, Fatah and Hamas seemed to have agreed on forming a technocrat government based on the 'Prisoners Document', but these talks also failed as both sides were unable to reach an agreement on positions and Hamas continued to refuse to recognize Israel and demanded guarantees that the sanctions against the PA would end.⁷⁸ Having reached a dead end, President Abbas asked Haniyeh to resign, which he refused, and the PLO Executive Committee called to dissolve the Hamas government and hold early elections.

In early November 2006, Israel had also launched "Operation Autumn Clouds" against Gaza, dramatically escalating air strikes and increasing Palestinian casualties. In response, Hamas fired rockets and called for resuming attacks inside Israel. Towards the end of the month, increased – but futile efforts were made on a deal to exchange the abducted soldier Shalit for Palestinian prisoners. Throughout December, Fatah-Hamas clashes flared up again, partially as PA security forces protested against their unpaid salaries.

HAMAS'S TAKEOVER OF GAZA, 2007

After months of escalating clashes, Hamas and Fatah formed a short-lived unity government (following the Saudi-brokered Mecca Agreement) headed by Ismail Haniyeh in March 2007. However, it failed quickly due to deep mistrust, ideological differences, and competition over security control. Fighting continued and culminated in a major battle in **June 2007**, during which Hamas seized key security and government sites. By 15 June, it had effectively taken full control of Gaza. In response, Israel imposed a land, air, and sea blockade, aid and political support were redirected to the Fatah-led PA in the West Bank, and Hamas/ Gaza faced increased isolation, humanitarian hardship, and despair, setting the stage for the eruption of large-scale violence in October 2023.

⁷² "Israel detains senior Hamas officials", *Ynet*, 29 June 2006; <https://www.ynet.co.il/article/3268844>.

⁷³ "Gaza ministry hit as troops mass," *The New York Times*, 30 June 2006; <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/30/world/africa/30iht-gaza.2090109.html>.

⁷⁴ https://www.btselem.org/jerusalem/20060703_revocation_of_residency_of_hamas_mps.

⁷⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/sep/12/israel>.

⁷⁶ <https://www.brecorder.com/news/3321403/hamas-wont-join-government-that-recognises-israel-20060923479737>.

⁷⁷ https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2006-10/11/content_705875.htm.

⁷⁸ "Haniyeh: PA Unity Gov't Depends on Lifting of Western Sanctions," *Haaretz*, 20 November 2006.

Since 2007, Palestinian governance has been split with Hamas ruling in Gaza (see Table below) and the Fatah-led PA in (parts of) the West Bank. Numerous efforts to reconcile the two factions have been made (see Table on page 16), but none succeeded to bridge their divisions (Islamic/religious vs. secular, Gaza vs. West Bank, armed resistance vs. negotiations, anti- vs. pro-Oslo, against vs. for recognizing Israel, quarrels over ministerial appointments) to permanently end their power struggle over governance and security control. During the following years, Gaza also became the site of multiple Israeli military operations (see Table on page 19).

While other Palestinian factions have been in crisis over the years, Hamas has survived political turmoil and maintained its support for resisting Israeli occupation and providing social services. However, it has also been criticized for restricting women’s freedoms and civil liberties, enforcing conservative social norms, suppressing dissent, and ruling without democratic accountability.

HAMAS GOVERNANCE OF THE GAZA STRIP SINCE 2007

Government	Dates	Prime Minister / Deputy	Details
PA National Unity Government	17 March-14 June 2007	Ismail Haniyeh / Azzam Al-Ahmad	Formed after the 8 Feb. 2007 Mecca Agreement between Hamas and Fatah; dissolved by president Abbas on 14 June after Hamas’s takeover of Gaza.
First Hamas government	14 June 2007-Sep. 2012	Ismail Haniyeh / Mohammed Awad	Ran in parallel, but internationally not recognized, with the Fatah-led PA in the West Bank since the Hamas takeover of Gaza. Was reshuffled by Haniyeh in Sep. 2012
Second Hamas government	Sep. 2012-2 June 2014	Ismail Haniyeh / Ziad Al-Zaza	Seven of the ten ministers were newly appointed; government resigned in June 2014 after the formation of the Palestinian unity government.
Palestinian Unity Government	2 June 2014-17 June 2015	Rami Hamdallah / Ziad Abu-Amr and Mohammad Mustafa	Was dissolved on 17 June 2015 by President Abbas on the grounds that it was unable to operate in the Gaza Strip.
Third Hamas government - Gaza Administrative Committee	17 Oct. 2016 - present	Ismail Haniyeh (2016-17) Yahya Sinwar (2017-19) Mohammed Awad (2019-21) Issam Al-Da’alis (2021-25) Community Support Committee (2025-)	After calls by Hamas to return to a Hamas governance in Gaza, the Hamas-dominated PLC supported a reshuffle of Palestinian government representatives in Gaza, without the consent of President Abbas, thereby in effect creating a new government.

Other major events during Hamas’s rule in brief:

In May **2010**, the Israeli raid on the Mavi Marmara, which was part of Gaza Freedom Flotilla that tried to break the Gaza blockade, brought global attention to conditions in Gaza and indirectly to Hamas’s role.

In **2011**, the “Arab Spring” shifted alliances in the region, with Hamas trying to improve ties with Egypt after the fall of President Mubarak and distancing itself from the Assad regime in Syria. After years of negotiations mediated by Egypt and Germany, Hamas and Israel reached a prisoner exchange agreement in October 2011, under which Gilat Shalit was eventually freed after five years in Gaza in exchange for over 1,000 Palestinian prisoners, among them many Hamas members who would soon assume leadership positions and champion more militant views, including Yahya Al-Sinwar.

In October **2012**, Hamas boycotted the PA's second municipal elections (held only in the West Bank), and Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani became the first head of state to visit Gaza since Hamas took control. On 14 December 2012, the PA permitted Hamas for the first time since 2007 to hold rallies marking its foundation in West Bank cities.

In April **2013**, Hamas's shura council re-elected Khaled Mashaal as leader. The fall of President Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt in July was a setback, as the new Al-Sisi government labeled the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization and cracked down on Gaza's border tunnels.

From 8 July to 26 August **2014**, Israel's "Operation Protective Edge" inflicted massive destruction on Gaza and left over 2,200 Palestinians killed. Throughout **2015**, Hamas struggled with slow rebuilding efforts following the Gaza War. It also cracked down on Islamic State-inspired Salafist groups operating in Gaza, which accused Hamas of being too moderate. In **2016**, the growing influence of Hamas' military wing (Izz Eddin Al-Qassam Brigades) created friction with its political leaders.

On 2 May **2017**, politburo chief Khaled Mashaal presented a new Hamas Charter ("A Document of General Principles and Policies") with a softened language. It accepted the establishment of a Palestinian state along the lines of June 4, 1967 (although without recognizing Israel or relinquishing Palestinian claims to all of historical Palestine), distanced itself from the Muslim Brotherhood, and stated that its fight was against the "racist, aggressive, colonial and expansionist" Zionist project, Israel, but not against Judaism or Jews.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Hamas dropped the demand to Islamize the PLO and instead called for its democratic reform as a basis for recognition.



On 6 May 2017, Haniyeh was elected chairman of Hamas's politburo, replacing Mashaal, and soon after relocated from Gaza to Qatar. In mid-May, the third municipal elections were held – again only in the West Bank. Hamas boycotted, after the Abbas-backed Constitutional Court ruled that the Hamas-backed court system in Gaza did not have jurisdiction over electoral matters. Nevertheless, on 1 November 2017, Hamas handed control of the Rafah crossing on the Gaza-Egypt border to the PA, which then returned to full operation for the first time in over a decade.

On 5 January **2018**, Hamas said it would be willing to place its military wing under PLO authority if it joined it and it became part of the official government framework.⁸⁰ However, on 16 February, President Abbas refused reconciliation until Hamas completely cedes control of Gaza.⁸¹ Also in 2018, the US named Haniyeh a "specially designated global terrorist", and from March to May (and sporadically afterwards), Gazan activists organized the "Great March of Return" protests at the border fence with Israel, which quickly turned violent and in which Hamas soon played a key role. During this time, Hamas leaders in Gaza repeatedly conveyed messages to Israel indicating their willingness to negotiate a long-term ceasefire.⁸²

In **2019**, Hamas began to face growing pressure from other factions and popular discontent due to frequent power outages and the dire economic situation, which got even worse during the **2020** COVID-19 Pandemic; Hamas implemented lockdowns and public health measures, but struggled with resources. Qatari funds continued to be a key source of stability, distributed under Israeli and international oversight. Later that year, Hamas strongly opposed the Abraham Accords, in which UAE and Bahrain normalized relations with Israel.

79 <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/doctrine-hamas>. For the full English document see: <https://web.archive.org/web/20170515114724/http://hamas.ps/ar/uploads/documents/06c77206ce934064ab5a901fa8bfef44.pdf>, for the Arabic version: <https://web.archive.org/web/20170712102137/https://hamas.ps/ar/uploads/documents/599abf9aafa1b76837c1242eb229e87b.pdf>.

80 <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/2018-01-05/ty-article/hamas-says-willing-to-integrate-military-wing-as-part-of-plo/0000017f-e5d8-da9b-a1ff-edff86080000>.

81 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-refuses-reconciliation-until-hamas-cedes-control-of-gaza-pa-ex-minister/>.

82 <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2018-05-07/ty-article/.premium/hamas-in-message-to-israel-willing-to-negotiate-long-term-truce/0000017f-e0d9-d7b2-a77f-e3df6f1f0000>

In late April **2021**, Hamas strongly criticized President Abbas' indefinite postponement of PLC elections scheduled for 22 May 2021 (for the first time since 2006). Tensions in East Jerusalem over evictions in Sheikh Jarrah and Israeli actions at Al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan led to widespread Palestinian unrest in May. Hamas, portraying itself as a defender of Al-Aqsa, launched rockets at Jerusalem and Israel responded with a 11-day bombing campaign ("Operation Guardian of the Walls").

Hamas also boycotted the fourth round of local elections in December 2021 and March **2022** as it insisted on general elections to be held as well. Throughout the rest of 2022, Hamas kept a relative calm, avoiding direct involvement in escalations, including the major confrontation in August 2022 between Israel and PIJ. In September 2022, Hamas announced its decision to restore full diplomatic relations with Syria.

In early **2023**, tensions in the West Bank, at Al-Aqsa Mosque, and in Gaza grew; Hamas increased its rhetoric about "defending Jerusalem."⁸³ In May, it launched rocket attacks in response to clashes at Al-Aqsa Mosque and on 7 October, it launched an unprecedented cross-border attack dubbed 'Al-Aqsa Flood' on Israel, during which some 1,200 Israelis were killed and 250 taken hostage. Israel responded by declaring war on Hamas, while de facto targeting the entire Gaza population, launching unprecedented aerial bombardments of and ground invasions, which are still ongoing.

By June **2025**, over 55,000 Palestinians have been killed, mostly children and women, but also most of Hamas' local leadership and its military apparatus has been decimated. Reports are mounting that public dissatisfaction with Hamas has surged in Gaza.

While losing both local legitimacy and regional backing, Hamas remains engaged in indirect ceasefire talks with the US and Israel via intermediaries like Egypt and Qatar, signaling increasing openness for pragmatic approaches - such as technocrat-led governance or unified Palestinian institutions. Since Hamas remains embedded in Gaza's social fabric it is unlikely to be fully sidelined in any future arrangement.

83 <https://english.palinfo.com/news/2023/02/17/68413/>; <https://english.palinfo.com/news/2023/04/11/76707/>; <https://www.presstv.co.uk/Detail/2023/4/10/701326/Palestine-Israel-Hamas-Netanyahu-al-Aqsa?>

KEY HAMAS-FATAH RECONCILIATION MEETINGS (2007–2024)

Date and Place	Meeting/Agreement	Participants	Main Issues Discussed	Outcome
8 Feb. 2007, Mecca, Saudi Arabia	Mecca Agreement	Mahmoud Abbas, Khaled Mashaal, Ismail Haniyeh; mediated by Saudi Arabia	End factional violence, form unity government, share power	Unity government formed on 17 March 2007 headed by Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh; collapsed after Gaza takeover by Hamas in June 2007
23 March 2008, Sana'a, Yemen	Sana'a Declaration	Fatah and Hamas representatives; mediated by Yemen	Return to pre-June 2007 status in Gaza, national unity	Initial agreement reached and signed but implementation failed due to differing interpretations and lack of trust between parties
Feb.-May 2009, Cairo, Egypt	Cairo Talks (five rounds)	Fatah and Hamas delegations; mediated by Egypt	Formation of a unity, security service reform, election preparations	Talks stalled over disagreement on recognizing Israel and government composition
Oct. 2009, Cairo	Cairo talks	Fatah and Hamas representatives; brokered by Egypt	Reconciliation	Talks stall when Hamas refuse to sign an Egyptian document that was drafted by Fatah
Feb. 2010, Gaza	Gaza visit	Fatah leader Nabil Sha'ath; representatives of Hamas and other factions	Reconciling rival factions	Agreement to resume unity talks
March, Sep., & Nov. 2010, Damascus, Syria	Damascus Meeting (several rounds)	Fatah and Hamas representatives including Azzam Al-Ahmad (Fatah), Musa Abu Marzouq (Hamas)	Egyptian reconciliation proposal (including holding elections, security sector reforms, mutual prisoner release)	Inconclusive, without significant breakthrough
26 March 2011, Ramallah	First talks in a year (due to massive protests in the West Bank and Gaza)	President Abbas and Hamas officials, brokered by Egypt	Reconciliation	Hamas accept Abbas' initiative to visit Gaza and end the division.
27 April 2011, Cairo	Cairo Talks	Fatah and Hamas representatives	Reconciliation and unity government	Announcement of intention to end a four-year rift by forming a unity government and holding elections within a year.

4 May 2011, Cairo	Cairo Agreement	Representatives from 13 Palestinian political factions, including Hamas and Fatah	Formation of technocrat government, release of political prisoners, elections	Agreement on technocrat unity government, elections, a joint security service, and prisoner release signed by Abbas and Khaled Mashaal, but implementation delayed
June 2011	Negotiations (follow-up of Cairo Agreement)	Representatives from Hamas and Fatah	Formation of a unity government	Talks suspended due to disagreement over who the Prime Minister would be and recognition of Israel.
Sep. 2011, Cairo	Resumption of negotiations	Representatives from Hamas and Fatah	Possible UN bid for Palestine.	Reconciliation meeting scheduled for the following week but with no progress.
24 Nov. 2011, Cairo	Cairo Meeting (called for by Hamas leader in exile, Khaled Mashaal)	Khaled Mashaal (Hamas), Mahmoud Abbas (Fatah)	Implementation of the May 2011 Cairo Agreement; Palestine's future government and unity	Participants say they have resolved all differences, will meet in December to finalize discussions. Elections date set for May 2012.
19 Dec. 2011, Cairo	Cairo Meeting (continued talks)	Hamas and Fatah leaders	Reconciliation, unity government.	Positive discussions are reported, but more work is needed for finalizing reconciliation.
6 Feb. 2012, Doha, Qatar	Doha Declaration or Agreement	Abbas and Mashal; mediated by Qatar	Follow up on the May 2011 Cairo Agreement on forming an interim technocratic unity government under Abbas and preparations for elections	Doha Agreement was signed but not implemented due to delays, resistance, and disputes over leadership roles
20 May 2012, Cairo	Cairo Hamas–Fatah Agreement	Fatah and Hamas representatives; mediated by Egypt	Implementation of Doha Agreement, voter registration, interim government	Agreement signed by Azzam Al-Ahmad (Fatah) and Musa Abu Marzouk (Hamas), which set 27 May as date for forming an interim national unity government and starting voter registration for elections, but delays hindered tangible progress and agreement was never implemented.
Jan. 2013, Cairo	Agreement	President Abbas and Hamas leader Khaled Masha'al	Reviving the stalled reconciliation accord	Plan to form a tripartite committee with Egypt to implement national reconciliation and form a transitional government of technocrats and independents.
23 April 2014, Gaza	Fatah-Hamas Reconciliation Agreement	Fatah and Hamas representatives, mediated by Egypt	Forming a unity government under the umbrella of the PLO, conducting elections, and defining government responsibilities	In response to the agreement, Israel suspended US-brokered peace talks with the Palestinians. A unity government was formed on 2 June 2014 under Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, but further implementation of the agreement was paralyzed by the 2014 Gaza War and external pressures.

25 Sep. 2014, Cairo	Fatah-Hamas Cairo Agreement	Hamas, PLO/Fatah delegation	Work, roles and responsibilities of the new unity government, ending the blockade of Gaza and reconstruction, PLC elections	Haniyeh and Abbas signed the agreement, specifying tasks and responsibilities of the new unity government, which convened on 9 October 2014 in Gaza but was hampered by the siege, reconstruction needs, and salary payment problems. President Abbas dissolved the Unity Government on 17 June 2015, saying it was unable to operate in Gaza.
Dec. 2015- Jan. 2016 & 7-8 Feb. 2016, Doha	Doha Reconciliation Talks	Hamas and Fatah representatives, brokered by Qatar	Complementing the 2014 Agreement; practical solutions for reconciliation	Inconclusive; Hamas claimed progress, but Fatah statements on Hamas having to cede Gaza raised tensions
12 Oct. 2017, Cairo	Fatah-Hamas Agreement	Azzam Al-Ahmad (Fatah), Saleh Al-Aroui (Hamas); mediated by Egypt	Transfer of Gaza governance to PA control, uniting Gaza and West Bank, security control, elections date, easing the blockade, PLO reforms	Agreement signed but implementation stalled over disputes, especially security and armed groups; details were postponed and open for interpretation and disagreement
22 Nov. 2017, Cairo	Two days of closed-door talks	Hamas, Fatah, other Palestinian political factions	Elections	Agreement to hold general elections by the end of next year.
24 Sep. 2020	Joint press conference	President Abbas, Hamas leaders	Coordination against Trump's peace plan, unity dialogue	New agreement for unity government and elections
Feb. 2021, Cairo	Pre-election agreement	leaders of a dozen Palestinian factions, including Fatah and Hamas	Reconciliation and presidential/PLC elections scheduled for May 2021	Agreement to respect the outcome of the elections (which, however, never took place as Abbas postponed them indefinitely on 29 April 2021)
13 Oct. 2022, Algiers	Algiers Declaration	14 Palestinian factions including Fatah and Hamas; mediated by Algeria	Presidential and parliamentary elections, institutional unification	An agreement on elections within a year was signed but never implemented; October 2023 Gaza war derailed the momentum
23 July 2024	Beijing Declaration	Fatah and Hamas leaders, 12 smaller Palestinian factions, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi	Formation of a unity government, post-war reconstruction of Gaza, vision for a Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders	Declaration on "ending division and strengthening unity" signed, but lacked a detailed implementation plan and faced international opposition, mainly from Israel
Oct.-Dec. 2024	Weeks of negotiations in Cairo	Fatah and Hamas leaders	Post-War administration of Gaza	Preliminary agreement on a committee of politically independent technocrats, mostly from Gaza, which would report to the PA.

MAJOR ISRAEL-GAZA WARS AND OPERATIONS SINCE THE HAMAS ELECTION VICTORY 2006

Dates	Operation	Main Reasons/Triggers	Outcome/Consequences
28 June –Oct. 2006	Summer Rains	Attack near Kerem Shalom with kidnapping of soldier Gilad Shalit	Over 400 Palestinians and 11 Israelis killed and 200 wounded; widely condemned for its “disproportionate use of force”
1–8 Nov. 2006	Autumn Clouds	Palestinian rocket attacks into Israel	Over 50 Palestinians were killed and 200 wounded, mainly in the Beit Hanoun area.
29 Feb.–3 March 2008	Hot Winter	Escalation of rocket fire from Gaza into southern Israel	Over 100 Palestinians killed and over 150 injured; 3 Israelis killed, 7 injured; international criticism of Israel's "disproportionate use of force"; no long-term resolution.
28 Dec. 2008 – Jan. 2009	Cast Lead (First Gaza War)	End of six-month truce, increase in Hamas rocket attacks on Israel	1,166–1,417 Palestinians and 13 Israelis killed; extensive damage in Gaza; unilateral ceasefires by both sides; Israel withdrew.
9–14 March 2012	Returning Echo	Targeted killing of Secretary General of the Popular Resistance Committees, Zohair Al-Qaisi.	At least 23 Palestinian killed, over 70 injured.
14–21 Nov. 2012	Pillar of Defense	Targeted killing of Hamas military chief Ahmad Jabari; escalation of rocket attacks	Over 160 Palestinians and 6 Israelis killed; Egyptian-brokered ceasefire.
8 July–26 Aug. 2014	Protective Edge	Kidnapping/murder of three Israelis and a Palestinian boy ⁸⁴ ; increased rocket fire from Gaza	Over 2,200 Palestinians and 73 Israelis killed; massive destruction in Gaza; ceasefire after 50 days.
6–21 May 2021	Guardian of the Walls	Tensions in Jerusalem (Al-Aqsa Mosque, Sheikh Jarrah evictions), Hamas rocket fire	At least 260 Palestinians and 13 Israelis killed; ceasefire brokered by Egypt.
5–7 Aug. 2022	Breaking Dawn	Arrest of Islamic Jihad leader in West Bank, fear of retaliation	Over 30 Palestinians killed; ceasefire reached.
9–13 May 2023	Shield and Arrow	Rocket attacks after Al-Aqsa clashes; targeted killing of Islamic Jihad leaders	At least 33 Palestinians killed and over 140 wounded; ceasefire agreed on 13 May 2023.
8 Oct. 2023 – present	Swords of Iron (Gaza War)	Massive Hamas-led attack on Israel (7 Oct 2023), rocket barrages, massacres, hostage-taking; Hamas cites blockade, Al-Aqsa tensions, settler violence	Over 52,000 Palestinians and 1,195 Israelis killed (as of May 2025); unprecedented destruction in Gaza; mass displacement; ongoing conflict with intermittent ceasefires.

⁸⁴ Three Israeli yeshiva students were abducted near Gish Etzion settlement bloc on 14 June 2014; Israel launched “Operation Brother’s Keeper” arresting over 300 Palestinians, mostly Hamas members. The bodies of the three Israelis were found on 30 June, Israeli extremists kidnapped and burnt to death 16-year-old Mohammed Abu Khdeir from Jerusalem, resulting in rockets fired from Gaza, in response to which Israel launched “Operation Protective Edge”.



"25th anniversary of Hamas" by Hadi Mohammad, 8 December 2012, by Fars Media Corporation, CC BY 4.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=138610010>



**Palestinian Academic Society
for the Study of International Affairs**

Tel: +972-2-626-4426 / 628-6566 | Fax: +972-2-628 2819

Email: passia@passia.org | Hind Al-Husseini, Alley, 2 Wadi Al-Joz | P.O. Box 19545, Jerusalem / Al-Quds



**Kindly supported by the
Friedrich Ebert Foundation
(FES), Jerusalem**