



# HAMAS

Terrorism, Governance, and  
Its Future in Middle East Politics

Jennifer Jefferis



PRAEGER SECURITY INTERNATIONAL

# Hamas

---

## *Terrorism, Governance, and Its Future in Middle East Politics*

JENNIFER JEFFERIS

Praeger Security International



An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC

Santa Barbara, California • Denver, Colorado

Copyright © 2016 by Jennifer Jefferis

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Jefferis, Jennifer L., author.

Title: Hamas : terrorism, governance, and its future in Middle East politics / Jennifer Jefferis.

Description: Santa Barbara, California : Praeger, 2016. | Series: Praeger security international | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015035828 | ISBN 9781440839023 (hardback) | ISBN 9781440839030 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: rHarakat al-Muq̣awamah al-Isleameiyah. | Terrorism—Middle East. | Political parties—Middle East.

Classification: LCC JQ1830.A98 H37554 2016 | DDC 956.95/3044—dc23

LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015035828>

ISBN: 978-1-4408-3902-3

EISBN: 978-1-4408-3903-0

20 19 18 17 16 1 2 3 4 5

This book is also available on the World Wide Web as an eBook.  
Visit [www.abc-clio.com](http://www.abc-clio.com) for details.

Praeger

An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC

ABC-CLIO, LLC

130 Cremona Drive, P.O. Box 1911

Santa Barbara, California 93116-1911

This book is printed on acid-free paper ∞

Manufactured in the United States of America

**Hamas**

For Ashleigh and Abigail,  
Because they are spectacular.

---

# Acknowledgments

I am incredibly grateful to Kirsten Brassard for her tireless and meticulous formatting assistance, to Sam the great intern-wrangler, to Tom the tasking-deflector, and to Adam, sounding-board, dog-walker, and best friend.

---

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
1. Introduction: An Organization on the Brink	1
2. Historical Context	7
3. Origins of a Movement	28
4. The Leadership of Hamas	47
5. Ideology of Hamas	71
6. Political Engagement	87
7. Military Engagement	107
8. Of Allies and Enemies	124
9. Conclusion: Hamas in the Future	143
<i>Appendices</i>	
<i>A. Hamas Charter</i>	149
<i>B. Hamas 2006 Electoral Campaign Platform</i>	171
<i>C. Text of 2011 Hamas Fatah National Reconciliation Accord</i>	177
<i>D. Unity Agreement between Hamas and Fatah, April 23, 2014</i>	179
<i>Notes</i>	183
<i>Bibliography</i>	197
<i>Index</i>	205

## CHAPTER 1

---

# Introduction: An Organization on the Brink

The famous philosopher Pythagoras had a special fondness for the number three. He considered it to be the number of harmony, and from the man who believed that music had the capacity to heal, this was high praise indeed. But Pythagoras is not the only one who has ever put a high value on the number three. In fact, some of the major world religions ascribe it spiritual significance. In Judaism the number three represents completeness, and the very essence of Christianity rests on the Trinity. In teaching, three generates a rhythm that is conducive to memorization, and in storytelling it has given us the three little pigs, the three musketeers, and the three wise men. The number three is the basis of GPS technology, and—of course—it is the third dimension that gives depth and solidity to the world.

It is interesting, then, that we tend to study important political phenomena on a plane of two. We define politicians as liberal or conservative; we classify wars as hot or cold; and we categorize nonstate actors as violent or nonviolent. In this two-dimensional field, it is not surprising that we struggle to understand the Islamic Resistance Movement of Hamas. Born of a religious mandate in a political conflict, seeking to govern in a territory that is not technically a state, and trying to fight a war without the authority to form a military, Hamas oozes out and over the lines we draw to describe them. They are charitable, and they are violent. They are flexible, and they are intractable. They are impossible to understand in two dimensions.

In this book we will examine a three-dimensional Hamas. We will see that they triangulate between the three concepts of religion, nationalism, and resistance to define their purpose, to legitimize their actions, and to garner support. But we'll also see that the dramatic events of the Arab

Uprisings in the Middle East have challenged Hamas's ability to maintain their careful balance of three. Increasingly they emphasize one concept to the detriment of the other two, and their popularity and efficacy are faltering because of it.

## A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Over the course of the past five years, the political landscape of the Middle East has been transformed. Deeply entrenched authoritarian regimes were upended by popular protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya, and attempts were made to accomplish the same in Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Syria. Five years after the fateful death of a Tunisian fruit seller, chaos and unrest continue to pervade the region.

But the impact of what came to be known as the Arab Spring was not limited to the effect it had on state governments. The aftermath of the uprisings in Egypt resulted in the Muslim Brotherhood—the notorious opposition movement—being elected to the office of the presidency, only to be unceremoniously removed a year later. The removal of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya set off a chain reaction of tribal warfare that is far from resolved today. The efforts to unseat the Alawite regime of Bashar al Assad in Syria has resulted in a horrifically bloody civil war that has given birth to one of the most gruesome terrorist organizations in recent history. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria is an organization that is gaining territory almost as quickly as they are gaining popular support among a violence-driven demographic from around the world.

In a tumultuous environment where the lines of state and nonstate actors are being forcibly transformed, the Palestinian resistance movement of Hamas has been particularly affected. As a nonstate movement with governance responsibility over the Gaza Strip, Hamas both suffers from and has the power to influence the emerging regional order.

Hamas has long been one of the most well-known terrorist organizations in the world. Their involvement in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, their foray into electoral politics, and their relationship with Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood have generated important questions about terrorism and conflict resolution, political participation, and nonstate-based alliances. But as the landscape of the Middle East shifts in the wake of the Arab Spring, as Gaza reels from yet another war with Israel, and as governments in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt embark on new policies to crack down on Islamist opposition, a new line of questions begs to be asked: What's next for Hamas? Will they be able to maintain the trinity of religion, nationalism, and resistance that defined them in a constantly shifting landscape of interests and responsibilities? Or are their interests better served by sacrificing one in pursuit of the other? Will they

be able to survive at all as local governments pursue new lines of cooperation in a fight against the instability they represent?

This book seeks to answer these questions by looking at how the themes of religion, nationalism, and resistance have been woven throughout Hamas's history, have defined Hamas's present, and will impact the Hamas of the future. We will come to see how the balance that the organization so carefully erected in the early days of their existence is wobbling in the wake of regional uprisings. We will argue that unless Hamas is successful in selling a narrative that clearly redefines resistance in nonviolent terms, the pressures they will face from the states in their vicinity and the population in their territory will be too strong to overcome, and the organization as we know it will cease to exist.

## A DELICATE BALANCE

When Harakat al Muqawamah al Islamiyyah, or the Islamic Resistance Movement, burst onto the Palestinian political scene at the start of the first Intifada in the late 1980s, they did so with a clear mission. They would transform the conflict that had been raging between the Palestinians and Israel for the past several decades, propelled by the righteousness of their cause. That righteousness came in the form of a religious mandate to make Palestine a state that allowed citizens to fulfill their purpose as servants of God. In contrast to the more secular nationalist perspective of the previously sole representative of the Palestinian people, Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Hamas promised that their nationalism was both pure and uncompromising. By introducing this method of righteous resistance, Hamas swirled the ideas of religion, nationalism, and resistance into a potent cocktail.

It was a cocktail many Palestinians were prepared to drink, and in the hands of an opposition movement, it yielded powerful results. Through the 1990s Hamas morally, politically, and physically opposed the PLO's efforts to pursue a nonviolent end to the conflict with Israel. Hamas's argument that Palestine was an Islamic waqf, or a religious endowment, undercut the PLO's moral authority to trade any land for peace with Israel. Hamas's instance that Israel should not be trusted to make good on any promises forged at a bargaining table meant that any governance-sharing agreements the PLO came to were doomed to Palestinian suspicion from the start. And Hamas's active support for all manner of violent attacks against Israeli citizens ensured that the PLO's credibility as an authoritative voice for Palestine was virtually useless because they did not have the ability to prohibit the violence the Israelis were so anxious to stop. So as an opposition figure, Hamas's blend of religion, nationalism, and resistance was compelling and effective.

But then in 2006 Hamas's successful participation in the Palestinian parliamentary elections put them in a position of having to govern—rather than oppose—the government, and the potent cocktail they'd concocted began to go rancid. The responsibility of acting like a state while being sanctioned as a terrorist group left Hamas ill equipped to ensure that the citizens they represented were receiving even basic necessities, and their popularity has plummeted. Their failure to monopolize the use of force in the territory they govern cripples their ability to effectively negotiate the end of the Gaza Blockade. Their failure to convince other violent actors in their territory that such negotiation is necessary is undercutting their legitimacy as a resistance movement. Moreover, the legacy of the Arab Spring is one of abiding mistrust between Islamist opposition groups and the states they oppose. As a group that could be categorized as both, Hamas is in a particularly precarious position. The question, then, that interested observers need to answer is how do the factors that define Hamas influence the role they will play in the future?

## OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

Over the course of the next eight chapters, we will look at the evolution of Hamas and what it means for an unstable region. We'll begin in Chapter 2 with a long view of the history that led to the Arab-Israeli crisis and the political and regional landscape that eventually birthed and shaped the organization of Hamas. We'll see that the territory of Israel/Palestine is dominated by religious significance and beset by political ambiguity. The result is that authority in the region has traditionally been held by external players whose interests are often quite different from the interests of those who live there. We'll argue that "ownership" of the land of Palestine has been awarded to those who can make the most convincing case. Hamas has inserted themselves in this fight by advancing a narrative that integrates religion, nationalism, and resistance.

In Chapter 3 we'll look at the more immediate history of Hamas, focusing particularly on their early years. We will explore the social context dominating Palestine and the Muslim Brothers' interest in transforming that context. We will see why the Brotherhood branch in Palestine ultimately became an organization functionally and organizationally separate from the parent branch of the Brotherhood in Egypt. We will examine the antagonistic relationship between Hamas and Fatah as well as the circumstances surrounding the writing of the Hamas charter. We will explain how Israel utilized the group as a counterweight to Fatah and how this empowered Hamas in the Palestinian community.

In Chapter 4 we'll consider Hamas through the lens of the personalities that have shaped it. By focusing on key leaders throughout Hamas's

history, their individual ideologies, and an explanation of how these ideologies shaped the behavior of the group under their tenure, the chapter explains why Hamas's approach and methods have not been consistent or monolithic, even as the themes of religion, nationalism, and resistance are valued by each of the influential players.

The next three chapters are organized to highlight each of the three elements that have been so crucial to defining and distinguishing Hamas. Chapter 5 explores the ideological foundation of the organization, paying particular attention to how Hamas conceptualizes the purpose of humankind and the state and why that has such an important impact on their drive for nationalism and their commitment to resistance. We'll see how Hamas has used their interpretation of religion to give weight to the Palestinian nationalist movement and to justify actions undertaken in pursuit of it, and we'll also see how events of recent years have challenged their ability to link their evolving methods with their timeless beliefs.

In Chapter 6 we'll see how Hamas's ideology influenced their political participation. This chapter focuses on the lead-up to the 2006 elections, including the internal debate about participation and the decision to field candidates. We'll see how the debate that preceded earlier decisions not to engage politically is eerily predictive of the challenges that Hamas has faced since they chose to participate in 2006. In this chapter we'll come to recognize how Hamas has failed to integrate the practice of governance into their balance between religion, nationalism, and resistance. As a government entity Hamas has swung between reckless belligerence and righteous certainty, but neither has produced the nationalist aims they seek. When they do make an effort to pursue those ends through compromise with Fatah or proposals of cease-fires with Israel, they fail to reconcile these efforts with their previous moral and violent stances, and as such they fail to carry key constituencies along with them.

In Chapter 7 we'll explore the militarization of Hamas, placing particular emphasis on the three most recent Israeli incursions into Gaza. We will examine the relationship between the political and religious leaders of Hamas and the armed wing of the organization, including members of the Qassam Brigades. We will analyze Hamas's decisions to use force against Israel and will explain the objectives the organization seeks through their provocation, as well as their success and failure in achieving them.

In Chapter 8 we will look in depth at Hamas's formative relationships with key actors in the region. In particular, we will examine the political and financial alliances Hamas has formed, maintained, and lost since the group was established, and we'll explain the circumstances of and reasons for these changes. We will examine Hamas's relationship with both state and nonstate financial sponsors, and we'll analyze the impact of these sponsorships on the group's political and ideological objectives. We will see how the events of the Arab Spring have upset Hamas's ability

to generate and maintain ideological and financial support and how this has pushed them toward a model that has less balance between religion, nationalism, and resistance and is more caught between the travails of governance and the lure of terrorism.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, we'll see how Hamas's blend of religion, nationalism, and resistance coupled with recent developments in surrounding states has brought Hamas to a crucial point in their existence. They are tottering on a ledge between governance and terrorism, and the choice they make has the power to resonate in the region for decades to come.

## CHAPTER 2

---

# Historical Context

Offering a historical context for the development of the Arab–Israeli crisis in general, and the development of Hamas more specifically, is a daunting task. A thorough account could conceivably begin anywhere from the time of the biblical prophet Abraham to the first Intifada in the late 1980s. Even the latter choice could produce hundreds of thousands of pages of explanation to offer the fullest view of the context, and of course the former could generate hundreds of thousands of volumes. In an effort to make this particular account simultaneously comprehensive and accessible, we will use the rest of this chapter to hit the high notes of history that give meaning to the conflict, without getting lost in the (admittedly rich) valleys that separate them.

### FROM PROMISED LAND TO WAQF AND BACK

In the first book of the Jewish Torah, we are introduced to the character of Abraham. The book of Genesis first mentions Abraham in the eleventh chapter, as a nomadic migrant in the land of Haran. In the next chapter Abraham is called by God to move to the land of Canaan, where God assures him he and his descendants will be granted many blessings:

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth be blessed through you."<sup>1</sup>

Over the next several decades, Abraham and his wife Sarah struggle to conceive, though God promises that their offspring will be "as many as the stars in the heavens." In an effort to facilitate this development,

Abraham sleeps with Sarah's servant, and she gives birth to a son, Ishmael. Eventually Abraham and Sarah have a child of their own, whom they call Isaac.

While the circumstances and names of Abraham's progeny may be interesting for their own sake, for our purposes they are even more so because Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all trace their roots to Abraham and his two children. But where Judaism and Christianity emphasize the role of Isaac in the development of their faith, Islam puts greater emphasis on Abraham himself. The reason for the distinction is thus: The Jewish and Christian traditions uphold that Isaac was Abraham's legitimate heir. Isaac went on to father twins, Jacob and Esau, one of whom fathered 12 men who would become the forefathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. From this perspective God's promise to make Abraham a great nation in a specific land refers to the descendants of Isaac in the land of Canaan.

The Muslim tradition places less emphasis on Abraham's children and more on the man himself.<sup>2</sup> According to the Muslim tradition Abraham was responsible for building the Kaba in Mecca, and the practice of Hajj (travelling to Mecca as a religious pillar) is done in imitation of the journey Abraham himself took. Muslims hold Abraham in very high esteem because he was considered to be a friend and confidant of God. Thus all of Abraham's children have significance in the Muslim tradition. Muslims trace the ancestry of the Prophet Mohammed back to Ismail but also revere the prophets Jacob, Moses, and David, all of whom came from Isaac's line.

So if Muslims view Abraham and all of his famous descendants with honor, why does the Old Testament account of God's covenant matter in a book about Hamas? The answer is more closely tied to the Jewish and Christian perception of that covenant than it is to Abraham's role in Islam. After God makes his covenant with Abraham, and Abraham fathers his sons, his second son goes on to father to Jacob, who has 12 sons, including one named Joseph. Joseph's brothers are not particularly fond of him, and in a fit of pique decide to sell him into slavery. Joseph ends up in Egypt, where he rises to surprising heights of power. Decades later he forgives his brothers for their treachery, and the tribes of Jacob end up settling in Egypt. But the theme of the covenant between Abraham and God still weaves into their new residence. According to Genesis 50:24 on his death-bed Joseph says to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."<sup>3</sup> He goes on to make the brothers swear that when God makes good on his promise, they will bury Joseph's bones in the Promised Land. As the generations pass the Hebrews increase in number to such an extent that the Egyptians become concerned about their own ability to retain control. The Hebrews are then enslaved by the Egyptians.

Eventually God calls on Moses (a prophet recognized as such in all three religious traditions) to liberate his people and lead them back to the land God had promised Abraham in the original covenant. As Moses leads the people back to what would eventually become the land of Israel, he writes down the Ten Commandments, which would form the basis for the future of Jewish law. When (after Moses's death) the Israelites finally make it to the Holy Land and conquer the people who were living there on their arrival, they set up a system of government in which they are ruled by judges who answer to God. Eventually this transitions into a monarchy, two of the most famous leaders of which are King David and King Solomon. Under their leadership the kingdom of Israel reaches its zenith of military, financial, and social power.

After this time of success ancient Israel begins to decline. Repeatedly from the time following Solomon's rule until 70 CE, the Israeli people undergo the process of exile from their land and redemption as exemplified by their return. In 70 CE the Jews revolt against Roman authority over their territory, and this sets off a wave of Roman efforts to rid the area of the Jewish population. The final attempt comes in 135 CE with the Bar Kokhba rebellion. This revolt results in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Jews and a strong determination from Rome to entirely prohibit the practice of Judaism in the area. The Jews who survive are forced into exile, and Israel as a nation with territory ceases to exist. Indeed, the Roman emperor at the time of the conquest, Emperor Hadrian, changes the designation of the new land from its traditional appellation of Judea/Samaria to Palestine.

The consequence of this final exile on the practice of the Jewish religion is significant. Jewish religious law at the time was centered on the existence of a Holy Temple. Here religious leaders could perform the sacrifices necessary to maintain obedience to God. When the Romans destroy the temple, the entire system of sacrifice is also destroyed. Rabbinical Judaism develops in its stead, but the sense that the existence of the Temple is tied to the right practice of the religion remains.

The present-day consequence of this history is that there are those in both the Christian and Jewish religious traditions who believe that the appearance of the Messiah promised in scripture is dependent on the restoration of this Temple system and the reestablishment of the historic kingdom of Israel. The majority of present-day Israelis do not subscribe to this view, but it is one that lines up well with the interests of nonreligious Israelis who see the state of Israel as a key condition for the preservation and security of their race. As we will see it was the merging of religious beliefs and security concerns that led to the creation of the modern-day state of Israel in 1948.

However, it is first necessary to consider the period of history that came between the 135 CE exile and the creation of the modern state. In the

decades after the fall of the Temple, Christianity went from an obscure, illegal, and highly persecuted sect to a rapidly growing religion that would eventually be embraced by the most powerful ruler of the time. In 313 CE the Roman emperor Constantine decriminalized the practice of Christianity, and on his deathbed in 380 CE, he declared Christianity the state church of the Roman Empire. Many years earlier Constantine had established a "New Rome" and made the city of Constantinople its capital. Though the last Roman emperor fell in 476 CE, the Byzantium Empire continued to flourish for another 1,100 years and from 330 to 640 ruled Palestine as part of its mandate.

Around 570 CE a man named Mohammed was born to the Quraysh tribe in the city of Mecca. Near 610 Mohammed shared with his close friends that he had been visited by the angel Gabriel. Through this angelic entity God conveyed to Mohammed his final revelation, which friends of the illiterate prophet copied down into what would become the holy Quran. Mohammed looked on the environment around him as a corrupted manifestation of what God had intended first through the Jews and then through the Christians. Islam was to be the final word on the oneness of God and the submission of his followers to his divine will.

The significance of this perspective is that Mohammed, and eventually his followers, believed that Islam was simply the continuation of Christianity, which was the continuation of Judaism. Thus all the holy sites and lands of religious significance to the first two also now held interest to this third and rapidly growing religion. In 638 under the leadership of Mohammed's second successor, Caliph Umar, Muslims wrestled control of Palestine (and much of the rest of the Levant) from the Byzantines. While over the next several centuries a number of splits and factions developed within Islam and those who governed under its umbrella, the land of Palestine was under the control of one form or another of Islamic rule until the Crusades began in 1099.

While the Crusades are often painted as wars centered exclusively on religious motivations, disputes, and challenges, in reality the geopolitical makeup of Europe also played an influential role. Though Jerusalem and its surrounding environs had been controlled by Muslims since the generation after Mohammed, Christians from Europe had still regularly travelled on pilgrimages to the holy sites of their faith. But when the Seljuk Turks took control of Jerusalem in 1071, they barred Christians from entering Jerusalem. The Turks also threatened to take Constantinople from the Byzantines, leading the Byzantines to seek support from an unlikely source: the Roman pope, from whom the Greek Orthodox Church had split several decades before. Pope Urban II saw the value in promoting his own military prowess in contrast to the secular powers of the day and made a speech exhorting all Christians under his dominion to set out to win Jerusalem back for Christ. In his words: