

## **Background: Hamas-Led “March of Return” Protests Planned for Passover**

Hamas, the radical Islamist terrorist group governing Gaza, is organizing a series of continuous mass protests on the Gaza border with Israel planned to last from March 30 (“Land Day”) to May 15 (Israel’s Independence Day called by Palestinians “Nakba Day”). Hamas claims these protests will be “non-violent,” but rising tensions on the Gaza border in recent weeks, and the expected large number of people, concerns Israeli officials that Hamas is seeking to cause provocations along the border leading to violent clashes so as to exploit the imagery for propaganda purposes.

Indeed, Hamas’ Twitter account publicized a March 9, 2018 sermon given by Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas’ political bureau, in which he explicitly stated that “it would be impossible to control the tens of thousands who would march.”

Hamas is ensuring that women and children will be at the forefront of these protests, while senior Hamas officials likely will be absent from the scene.

### **Background on Hamas:**

- Hamas is a terrorist organization considered as such by the U.S., E.U., Canada, and various Arab governments. Its radical Islamist ideology is similar to other violent extremists in the Middle East and Africa including Hezbollah, Islamic State (ISIS), Al Qaeda, Boko Haram. Hamas has ties with the Sinai branch of ISIS, which is has waged a bloody war against Egypt for years.
- Israel withdrew completely in Gaza in 2005. To prevent the importation of weapons into Gaza, Israel imposed a blockade. Egypt, too, blockades its border with Gaza to prevent smuggling of weapons to ISIS in the Sinai. Even the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in the West Bank has placed sanctions on Hamas.
- Hamas ideology explicitly promotes endless conflict and violence toward the goal of destroying Israel. Hamas leaders consistently reject Israel’s existence and frequently use overtly anti-Semitic stereotypes, often calling for the ethnic cleansing of Israel’s Jewish population of 6.8 million.
- Hamas is responsible for murdering hundreds of Israeli civilians using suicide bombings, shootings, knifings, and car rammings.
- Since 2001 Hamas has fired an estimated 15,000 rockets indiscriminately into Israeli towns and cities, terrorizing hundreds of thousands of Israeli civilians. These attacks provoked three wars between Israel and Hamas in 2008-9, 2012 and 2014.
- Hamas has spent hundreds of millions of dollars constructing a sophisticated network of military tunnels in Gaza. This includes cross-border attack tunnels used in the 2014 war, smuggling tunnels across Gaza’s border with Egypt, and internal used to store rockets, munitions and to hide fighters and their command infrastructure.
- In the first and only Palestinian Authority elections of 2006, Hamas won a majority of seats in the Palestinian Parliament. The PA has not held elections since.

- In 2007, Hamas seized control of Gaza after staging a bloody coup against their Palestinian rival Fatah. The people of Gaza have been trapped under Hamas' repressive rule since.

**Hamas is organizing this event to distract from its failed and ineffective governance.**

- The hundreds of millions of dollars Hamas spends on its terrorist infrastructure takes away from the needs of the people it governs. Money that could be spent on hospitals, infrastructure such as water and electricity, and attracting business instead is diverted to conducting ongoing warfare.
- Hamas is spending about \$28 million on the march.<sup>i</sup>
- Hamas officials have arranged 250 buses from schools and mosques – promoting the protests to Gazans as if they are a summer camp-type event.

**Hamas specifically planned to begin the protests on Passover Eve to terrorize civilians living in southern Israel.**

- To ensure that Israelis can observe the Passover holiday in safety, Israel has doubled the number of troops in the area aiming to deter any attempted mass infiltration, or damage to the border fence and other security infrastructure.

**Other recent incidents cast doubt on Hamas' willingness to keep the protests peaceful.<sup>ii</sup>**

- On March 28, Gazans attempted to pull down the border fence. Other protestors lit fires and threw rocks at Israeli soldiers on the other side.<sup>iii</sup>
- Additionally, in the last week alone about a dozen heavily armed Gazans have infiltrated Israel, with some travelling some 12 miles into Israel before being captured.<sup>iv</sup>
- On February 19, Palestinians hid a booby-trapped bomb at the border fence. Four Israeli soldiers were injured when it exploded.<sup>v</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Issues/Pages/Hamas-launches-confrontation-campaign-on-Israelis-border.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-diplomats-gird-for-gaza-land-day-clashes-warn-hamas-responsible/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-opens-fire-at-rioters-on-gaza-border-as-tensions-mount/>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5200666,00.html>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/gaza-border-blast-the-other-side-may-have-found-israel-s-weak-point-1.5825835>