

**New York State Office of Homeland Security
Focus Report:**

Hamas' U.S. Network

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Testifying on August 23, 2005 in a Tampa courtroom, FBI Special Agent Kerry Myers shocked onlookers by revealing that the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) had planned a terrorist attack inside the United States. According to Myers,¹ authorities thwarted the attack, which would have been the first committed by PIJ outside Israel or the occupied territories.

Myers' disclosure has raised questions about the threat Palestinian terrorists pose to the continental United States. Most notable is the threat posed by Hamas, a Palestinian terrorist organization founded shortly after the outbreak of the first *intifada* that seeks to destroy Israel and replace it with an Islamic state. Although Hamas' leaders have claimed that they are willing to broker a deal with Israel, the Hamas charter outlines the movement's rejectionist philosophy: "Giving up any part of Palestine is like giving up part of its religion... There is no solution to the Palestinian problem except by Jihad. The initiatives, options, and international conferences are a waste of time and a kind of child's play." In January 2006, after Hamas won control of the Palestinian parliament in a landslide election victory, top official Mahmoud Zahar said, "we have no peace process. We are not going to mislead our people to tell them we are waiting, meeting, for a peace process that is nothing."



Hamas supporters celebrate the group's January 2006 election victory

Since the beginning of the second *intifada* in September 2000, Hamas has carried out over 425 terrorist attacks in Israel, including a number of high-casualty suicide bombings. For example, in June 2001, a Hamas suicide bomber killed 21 at a Tel Aviv nightclub, while a March 2003 bus bombing claimed 17 lives. In total, Hamas has killed more than 375 Israeli citizens and soldiers since 2000.

After Israel banned Hamas as a terrorist group in 1989, the organization recognized it would need considerable assistance from abroad. As one terrorism analyst observed in 1996, "when the confrontation with Israel began to escalate militarily, Hamas desperately needed an external haven to direct operations, raise funds, coordinate political activities and disseminate propaganda... Hamas found that the U.S.—with its...pre-existing militant anti-Soviet infrastructure—provided a virtual paradise for the emerging Hamas leadership to raise funds and develop the external networks needed to coordinate attacks back in their homeland." Highlighting the success of Hamas' efforts in the United States, FBI Director Robert Mueller testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee in February 2005 that "of all the Palestinian groups, Hamas has the largest presence in the U.S. with a robust infrastructure, primarily focused on fundraising, propaganda for the Palestinian cause, and proselytizing."

Many of the key figures who set up that support structure came together at the Marriott airport hotel in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania from October 1-3, 1993 to discuss operational details.

¹ Myers was the lead agent in the investigation of alleged Palestinian Islamic Jihad operative Sami al-Arian. In December 2005, a Florida jury found Al-Arian not guilty on eight counts, including conspiracy to maim or murder outside the United States. After a five month-long trial and 13 days of deliberations, the jury failed to reach a unanimous verdict on nine other counts against Al-Arian, including a charge of conspiracy to provide material support to a terrorist group.

Organized by senior Hamas operative Abdelhaleem al-Ashqar, who was indicted in August 2004 in Chicago for allegedly participating in a 15-year racketeering conspiracy to finance Hamas' activities, the meeting was called in the wake of the Oslo Accords. In the Accords, then Palestinian Authority head Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin agreed to a future of coexistence and independence for the Israelis and Palestinians. According to the U.S. government, which surveilled the Philadelphia gathering, "[t]he purpose of the meeting was to determine...[a] course of action in support of Hamas' opposition to the peace plan and to decide how to conceal...activities from the scrutiny of the United States government."

At the meeting, participants attempted to obscure their true agenda. As a declassified FBI analysis² of the wiretaps states, participants "spent much effort hiding their association with the Islamic Resistance Movement, a.k.a. HAMAS. Instead, they referred to HAMAS as 'Samah,' which is HAMAS spelled backwards."

In addition to working to obscure their ties to "Samah," those at the meeting discussed how organizations in the U.S. could support Hamas, fully aware that "the democratic environment in the United States allowed them to perform activities that are extremely important to their cause." They noted that "[t]he institutions here should be at the service of the Movement over there...This should include finance, information, political, and everything." Another speaker urged his colleagues to "focus on those people who are directly connected with Jihad."

Participants also recognized the critical importance of domestic lobbying. Stressing the need for deeper engagement with the American Muslim community, one attendee discussed the groups "attempting to encourage the Islamic community to be involved in the political life in this country." He commented, "[w]e should assist them in this task. This will be an entrance for us to put, through the Islamic community, pressure on the Congress and the decision makers in America."



Musa Abu Marzook



HLFRD Logo

The FBI analysis further assessed that "all [twenty-five] attendees of this meeting" were "Hamas members." Six of those attendees were officials from the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (HLFRD), a Richardson, Texas-based "charity" founded in 1989 that served as Hamas' primary fundraising arm in the U.S. In its infancy, HLFRD received \$210,000 from Musa Abu Marzook, the Damascus-based deputy "political" chief of Hamas who spent over a decade living in the United States, during which he played an integral role in establishing the financial and propaganda machines that would effectively serve Hamas' interests for years to come.³ Marzook also had close familial ties to HLFRD, for he was related to the organization's Treasurer and Chairman of the Board, both of whom attended the 1993 Philadelphia meeting.

² FBI analysis of the Philadelphia conference submitted as an exhibit in Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development v. Ashcroft, (D.D.C 02-442 GK).

³ Marzook was indicted in August 2004 in Chicago for his longstanding involvement with the Hamas enterprise. Currently, Marzook is not in U.S. custody, as he reportedly lives freely in Syria.

With Marzook's blessing, HLFRD established itself as a national presence, opening offices in New Jersey, California, Illinois, Michigan, and Florida.⁴ Moreover, through a "Matching Gift Program," major corporations such as Microsoft, Ericsson, and American Express unwittingly matched employees' contributions to HLFRD. HLFRD's activity continued until the U.S. Treasury Department froze its assets in December 2001. On December 4th, 2001, President Bush stated, "money raised by the Holy Land Foundation is used by Hamas to support schools and indoctrinate children to grow up into suicide bombers. Money raised by the Holy Land Foundation is also used by Hamas to recruit suicide bombers and to support their families." Less than three years later, in July 2004, HLFRD and seven top officials, six of whom were at the Philadelphia meeting, were indicted in Texas for providing material support to Hamas. According to federal prosecutors, HLFRD sent more than \$36 million to Hamas from 1988-2001.

HLFRD's prolific fundraising efforts were greatly facilitated⁵ by the Chicago-based Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP),⁶ whose top officials also attended the 1993 Philadelphia meeting, according to FBI records. IAP, which was founded by Musa Abu Marzook and received \$490,000 from him, worked closely with HLFRD, consistently encouraging people to donate to the "charity" in its publications and on its website. Moreover, according to IAP's President, much of the money raised at IAP's annual conferences, which often featured high-ranking Hamas leaders, went directly to HLFRD. Reflecting this relationship, IAP's President stated in 2003 that IAP worked to "promote [HLFRD] in every way" it could.⁷

To complement its collaboration with HLFRD, IAP did far more to support Hamas. The organization published the Hamas charter, a viciously anti-Semitic document that calls for the murder of Jews, and noted in its Arabic-language publication *Ila Filastin*, "[t]he IAP will deliver this charter of the Hamas movement...all over the American continents." In addition to disseminating the Hamas charter and Hamas communiqués, IAP used its three publications to frequently praise Hamas terror attacks. The October 1994 headline of its *Al-Zaitounah* publication captures the magazine's ideological bent: "In Its Greatest Operation, Hamas Takes Credit for the Bombing of an Israeli Bus in the Center of Tel Aviv." IAP's audiovisual wing, Aqsa Vision, even distributed videos celebrating Hamas attacks, showcasing operatives undergoing training, and documenting the interrogation of "collaborators" prior to execution.

IAP also followed the guidance put forth at the 1993 Philadelphia meeting to "encourage the Islamic community to be involved in the political life in this country" and to "pressure...the Congress and the decision makers in America." In its mission statement, IAP noted that "it issues public statements, action-alerts, press releases, and articles. It organizes demonstrations, press conferences, protest-telegrams, and...petition drives. The IAP lobbies political leaders [sic], works in coalitions, and encourages voter registration and election participation." Reflecting

⁴ HLFRD became even more important to Hamas in 1997, when Israel shut down the organization's offices and labeled HLFRD a Hamas front group.

⁵ The IAP-HLFRD relationship was aided by overlapping leadership. For example, in 1989, HLFRD's CEO, Shukri Abu Bakr (a Philadelphia meeting attendee), served on IAP's Board of Directors. Another Philadelphia meeting attendee, Abdel Jabbar Hamdan, was HLF's top fundraiser and an IAP member.

⁶ IAP also established offices in Indiana, Arizona, Illinois, California, and Texas.

⁷ According to Rafeeq Jaber, IAP's President, the two organizations even had a contract codifying their close relationship

these goals, IAP's website prominently displayed links titled "Contacting Congress," "Contacting the White House," and "Contact [the] US State Department."

Although IAP has never been subject to government action, government documents and court rulings have unambiguously tied the group to Hamas. A 2001 Immigration and Naturalization Service memo noted that the "facts strongly suggest" that IAP is "part of Hamas' propaganda apparatus," while in August 2002, a federal judge ruled that "the Islamic Association for Palestine has acted in support of Hamas." Then, in 2004, an immigration judge labeled IAP a "terrorist organization" and noted its "propensity for violence." Moreover, also in 2004, IAP was held liable in Chicago in a \$156 million civil judgment stemming from the 1996 Hamas murder of an American citizen in Israel. Following this crushing blow, IAP reportedly ceased operations, ending over a decade of activity that supported Hamas.



While IAP and HLFDRD constituted the most powerful nodes in Hamas' U.S. network, other U.S. entities have provided considerable support to Hamas as well. To complement IAP's propaganda efforts, Hamas leader Musa Abu Marzook created the Springfield, Virginia-based United Association for Studies Research (UASR), a think-tank purportedly dedicated to "the study of on-going issues in the Middle East, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict." In fact, according to former UASR employee Mohammed Salah,⁸ whom the US government named a Specially Designated Terrorist in 1995, UASR was "the political command of Hamas in the United States." A 2004 Justice Department court filing asserted that "UASR through its Executive Director, has demonstrated its sympathies for Hamas and that several of its key associates are, or have been, integrally involved in Hamas activities." Reflecting this conclusion, UASR's publications have called for the annihilation of all Jews and praised "the blessed Jihad Intifadah." Open sources also report that high-ranking Hamas operatives in the West Bank and Gaza maintained telephone contact with UASR in the 1990's, and that UASR hosted meetings attended by high-ranking Hamas operatives. Despite considerable media scrutiny, UASR continues to operate in Virginia.

Furthermore, to supplement the funds provided by HLFDRD, Hamas has received financial support from other charitable front groups. For example, the Springfield, Missouri-based Islamic American Relief Agency (IARA),⁹ which operated in the U.S. for nearly two decades, allegedly funneled money to Hamas, Al Qaeda, and Al-Ittihad al-Islamiya. Shut down by the U.S. Treasury Department on October 13, 2004, IARA used "collection boxes marked 'Allah' and 'Israel,' signaling the funds would be directed towards attacks against Israelis." Another alleged component of Hamas' U.S. financial network was the Al-Aqsa Educational Fund, a charity

⁸ Salah was indicted in Chicago in August 2004 with Musa Abu Marzook and Philadelphia meeting organizer Abdelhaleem al-Ashqar for allegedly participating in a 15-year racketeering conspiracy to finance Hamas' activities

⁹ The U.S. government action targeted IARA's worldwide network. IARA was headquartered in Khartoum, Sudan and maintained over 40 offices throughout the world, including in the United States.

headed by 1993 Philadelphia meeting organizer and indicted Hamas operative Abdelhaleem al-Ashqar.

Hamas has also exploited an array of businesses in the U.S. to raise funds. In April 2005, the operators of Infocom, a Richardson, Texas computer company, were convicted of doing business with a Specially Designated Terrorist, after accepting \$250,000 in investment capital from Musa Abu Marzook. Exemplifying the incestuous links that bind Hamas' US network, Infocom's owners are related to Marzook and held leadership positions with IAP and HLF RD. What's more, one of Infocom's owners attended the 1993 Philadelphia meeting. Additionally, according to U.S. government documents, Hamas invested millions of dollars in real-estate projects nationwide through BMI Inc., a defunct Secaucus, New Jersey investment firm that also received funding from Musa Abu Marzook. A 2003 U.S. Customs Service report summarizing an interview with BMI founder Soliman Biheiri¹⁰ documents Hamas' awareness of the benefits of the U.S. operating environment: "Bihieri was advised to go to the United States and establish an Islamic financial corporation to take advantage of both the Islamic money in the United States and the freedom of operation of the U.S. financial market...[Bihieri] related that by establishing an American financial company on U.S. soil, they would have the freedom to do as they pleased regarding business activity, he would just have to follow SEC guidelines." U.S. authorities contend that BMI is a component of the Safa Group, a complex array¹¹ of Virginia businesses and charities that allegedly funneled money to Hamas, Al Qaeda, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Although Safa Group entities were raided in 2003, indictments have yet to be filed.

Moreover, sympathetic individuals and mosques in the U.S. have raised significant amounts of money for Hamas. For example, according to federal prosecutors, Mohammed al-Moayad, a prominent Yemeni sheikh, raised "money for...jihad...at the Al Farouq mosque in Brooklyn." Moayad, who had personal contacts with one of Hamas' founders, then funneled that money to Hamas and Al Qaeda. During Moayad's 2005 trial, an informant testified that al-Moayad claimed to have delivered \$3.5 million to Hamas and \$20 million to Osama bin Laden before 9/11. In July 2005, a Brooklyn federal judge sentenced Moayad to 75 years in prison.

Declassified FBI reports have further documented the financial support activities of other Hamas-linked individuals in the U.S., such as Mohammad al-Hanooti. Identifying al-Hanooti as "a big supporter of Hamas," a 2001 FBI memorandum cited a "credible" source who reported "that Al-Hanooti collected over six million U.S. dollars for...Hamas." Notably, al-Hanooti, who served as the Imam of the Islamic Center of the Capital District in Colonie, New York from 2000-2002, attended the 1993 Philadelphia meeting and served on the Islamic Association for Palestine's Board of Directors. According to FBI documents, still another 1993 Philadelphia meeting attendee, Mohammed El-Mezain, who chaired the HLF RD's

¹⁰ On October 12, 2004, a federal jury in Alexandria, Va., convicted Biheiri of making false statements to ICE agents during a 2003 interview, in which he told agents he had no business or personal ties to Musa Abu Marzook. During Biheiri's trial, the government presented files seized from Biheiri's computer showing that Marzook had invested \$1 million in BMI and other Biheiri-controlled U.S. business ventures.

¹¹ In an 106 page affidavit filed in support of the Safa raids, U.S. Customs Agent David Kane wrote that "evidence exists that individuals associated with the Safa Group are using the various affiliated charities and companies under their control to transfer money in convoluted transactions through a network of inter-related organizations designed to prevent the United States from tracking the ultimate recipients..."

board, allegedly raised money for Hamas at the Islamic Center of Passaic County in New Jersey¹² in the mid-1990's.

In the years since 9/11, as the U.S. government has cracked down on charitable front groups¹³ and terrorist financing at radical mosques, operatives have turned to criminal activities to raise funds for Hamas. Testifying before the House Financial Services Committee on September 24, 2003, the FBI's Assistant Director of Counterterrorism John Pistole stated that "investigations have uncovered a myriad of criminal activities used to generate funds, a portion of which is then forwarded to NGOs associated with Hamas. Some of the suggested criminal activity include, but are not limited to, drug trafficking, credit card fraud, counterfeit products, fraudulent documents, cigarette tax fraud and stolen infant formula." For example, in January 2002, the DEA announced the arrest of more than 100 people involved in an expansive methamphetamine network. The investigation resulted in the arrest of individuals in twelve cities across the United States and Canada, along with the seizure of more than 179 pounds of finished methamphetamine, six clandestine drug laboratories, and \$4.5 million in U.S. currency. Authorities were able to track \$10 million back to the Middle East, some of which allegedly went to Hamas. In total, Hamas' criminal activities in the U.S. reportedly raise millions of dollars.

Thus, by exploiting America's free and open society, Hamas has reaped considerable rewards from its extensive network. In fact, at the 1993 Philadelphia meeting, the participants were acutely cognizant of the value of this infrastructure. The FBI report on the meeting states, "the participants decided that for fund-raising purposes, the United States theater was very valuable to them. They stated they could not afford to lose it."



Given the effectiveness of the Hamas network, one theory that many analysts have suggested is that the group would never risk damaging such a rich pool of resources by launching attacks on American soil. For example, former FBI official Dennis Lormel commented, "being that the United States is such a fertile ground for fundraising, it is less likely they [Hamas] would do something because if they were to attack in the United States, it would draw more attention to their activities." In February 2005 Senate testimony, FBI Director Robert Mueller echoed Lormel's conclusions, noting that "it is the FBI's assessment, at this time, that there is a limited threat of a coordinated terrorist attack in the U.S. from Palestinian terrorist organizations, such as Hamas... We believe that the primary interest of Palestinian terrorist groups in the U.S. remains the raising of funds to support their regional goals." Additionally, many Palestinians have

¹² El-Mezain founded the Islamic Center of Passaic County and served as its Imam.

¹³ According to the FBI's Assistant Director of Counterterrorism John Pistole, "the FBI is focused on identifying NGOs, which seek to replace HLFDR's position as the major financier of Hamas in the U.S. To date, no NGOs exist which compare with the fund-raising capabilities exhibited by HLFDR." Open source reporting has identified Kindhearts and KinderUSA as possible HLFDR "replacements."

historically viewed the U.S. as the country most likely to pressure Israel to cede territory. Further, now that Hamas has gained control of the Palestinian parliament, the group may be even more hesitant to take actions that could damage its international standing, especially since key international officials appear willing to give Hamas a second chance. U.N. envoy to the Middle East Alvaro de Soto urged, “let’s judge the participants in the government by what they do, not by what they have said in the past.”

Although Hamas has never launched a strike on American soil, a number of critical points bear noting. According to an August 2004 FBI affidavit, Hamas members were among the conspirators who, in 1993, plotted to bomb New York City landmarks and tunnels. Also, as documented in open source reporting, the government assesses that Hamas operatives with military training have entered the country and currently have the capacity to carry out terrorist attacks in the U.S.

While capability certainly does not imply intent, two incidents have heightened fears. In December 2003, Israeli authorities arrested Jamal Akal, a Canadian citizen who received weapons and explosives training from Hamas and was being trained to launch attacks against Jewish targets in New York City and Canada. According to a statement by the Israeli government, Akal met Ahmed Wahabe, a senior Hamas terrorist, in the Gaza Strip. After instructing Akal to kill a senior Israeli official who would be visiting the U.S., Wahabe asked Akal to “attack members of the US and Canadian Jewish communities, either by shooting or by bombing their homes and/or cars.” Wahabe added, “New York is an easy place to find Jews.” Notably, Akal told Israeli officials that he was instructed to blame the attack on Al Qaeda, rather than Hamas.



Jamal Akal

Then, in August 2004, Ismail Elbarasse, Musa Abu Marzook’s former personal secretary, was arrested after authorities witnessed his wife videotaping Maryland’s Chesapeake Bay Bridge from their SUV as Elbarasse drove. The images captured by Elbarasse’s wife included close-ups of cables and other features that, according to an FBI affidavit, were “integral to the structural integrity of the bridge.” Court records reveal that a search of Elbarasse’s home turned up an “anarchist cookbook,” a document identified as “Spreadsheet of trained pilots ‘Law Enforcement Only,’” and a piece of paper containing the address of the Norfolk Naval Station.

The affidavit in the Elbarasse case details disturbing operational cooperation between Hamas and Al Qaeda:

Al Qaeda, with a disproportionate number of leaders from Palestinian backgrounds, has exhibited a propensity to use others to collect intelligence or conduct reconnaissance. In previous years, Al Qaeda commanders and officials stationed in western countries, including the United States, have recruited Hamas operatives and volunteers to carry out reconnaissance or serve as couriers. With the increased law enforcement pressure on Al

Qaeda since 9-11, there has been a renewed emphasis by Al Qaeda to find confirmed jihadist supporters in the United States by trying to enlist proven members of other groups such as Hamas to make up for the vacuum on the field level.¹⁴

Al Qaeda's recent infiltration of the Gaza Strip, a perennial Hamas stronghold, is also significant because it could herald increased cooperation between Hamas and Al Qaeda. Following the Israeli disengagement from Gaza, the Israeli Ministry of Defense and the Israeli Foreign Ministry announced that Al Qaeda operatives had entered the evacuated areas from Egypt. Internet statements from the "Al Qaeda-Palestine Frontier Jihad Brigades," which pledged "allegiance to...the global jihad..." provided further evidence confirming this conclusion. Then, in a September 2005 interview, Hamas spokesman Mahmoud az-Zahar acknowledged the presence of Al Qaeda members in Gaza and claimed that Hamas operatives in Gaza were in telephone contact with Al Qaeda members in other countries. These developments coincided with an Al Qaeda Internet "newscast," in which the host discussed a new Hamas video and added "may Allah help them stay firm on the road to the truth."

Ideological continuity between Al Qaeda and Hamas has deep roots, especially since, according to the U.S. government, Al Qaeda co-founder Abdullah Azzam is a "spiritual founder of Hamas." Highlighting that continuity,¹⁵ in an April 2004 audiotape, Osama bin Laden vowed to "punish America" for Israel's "killing of the old, handicapped [Hamas co-founder] Sheikh Ahmed Yassin."

Furthermore, in the wake of the Iraq war, Hamas' leadership has made increasingly strident threats against the U.S. For example, in a February 2003 Fox News interview, Hamas founder Ahmed Yassin ordered Muslims to kill Americans wherever they were found if U.S. troops set foot on Iraqi soil. That same year, in an article titled "Why Shouldn't We Attack the United States?," Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi argued that for Hamas, attacking America was not only "a moral and national duty—but above all, a religious one." In 2004, Rantisi took part in a Gaza rally supporting the Iraqi insurgency; amid chants of "Death to America" and the burning of American flags, Rantisi called on Iraqis to prepare "prepare tens of thousands of explosive belts" and blow themselves "up against the American enemy. Bomb them in Baghdad." He added, "I call on all Arab nations to burn the ground underneath the feet of the Americans in all capitals." Shortly thereafter, Hamas "political" head Khaled Mishal¹⁶ signed a statement urging all Muslims to join Muqtada al-Sadr's Al-Mahdi army in fighting American troops in Iraq. And in October 2005, Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar warned that President Bush's actions in the

¹⁴ In February 2005 Senate testimony, FBI Director Robert Mueller noted that Hamas' "United States network is theoretically capable of facilitating acts of terrorism in the United States." And a January 2006 FBI Phoenix document stated, "Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) such as...Hamas...maintain a presence within Arizona. While the activities of these groups generally include non-operational activities such as fund raising, recruiting, and spreading propaganda, the presence of these networks provides terrorists with a ready capability to carry out attacks if directed to do so."

¹⁵ Also of note, in November and December 2005, a Norwegian organization conducted 1849 face-to-face interviews with respondents aged 18 years and up in the West bank and Gaza Strip. 65 percent of those polled supported Al Qaeda actions in the U.S. and Europe.

¹⁶ Mishal's cousin, Akram, served as the Project and Grants Director for the HLRFD and was indicted in July 2004 for providing material support to Hamas. Akram Mishal was indicted along with Mufid Abdulgader, a top HLF fundraiser and the half-brother of Khalid Mishal. Abdulgader, who attended the 1993 Philadelphia meeting, worked for the city of Dallas as an engineer.

Middle East were “placing America in danger,” accusing him of “shooting innocent populations with missiles” in Iraq and Afghanistan and starting a confrontation “between the West and 1.3 billion Muslims...”



Hamas rally in Hebron, March 30, 2005

Also of note are reports of Hamas’ expanded activities outside of Israel. A March 2003 posting on an Internet forum affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood announced that a Hamas branch had been formed in Kuwait to launch attacks on U.S. and British forces in the region. Additionally, May 2003 open source reporting cited Jordanian security officials who claimed “two Hamas agents...traveled to Afghanistan to recruit the remnants of Al Qaeda’s network to join its operations in the Arab world.” And, according to open sources, NATO officials suspect that Ahmed Mustafa Ibrahim Ali, a Palestinian who killed three American corrections officers at a prison in Kosovo in April 2004, may have had ties to Hamas. Open sources also report that Hamas has been recruiting Palestinians to fight in Chechnya by distributing videos and posters glorifying Chechen terrorist leader Shamil Basayev. Moreover, in 2005, Hamas launched an Urdu website to attract support in India and Pakistan.

Thus, while Al Qaeda receives the majority of the attention in the War on Terror, Hamas’ global scope cannot be overlooked. For over fifteen years, Hamas has exploited America’s freedoms in order to establish an extensive support network. Composed of organizations such as HLFRD, IAP, and UASR, that infrastructure has greatly facilitated Hamas’ deadly campaign against Israel and will likely continue do so for years to come. Eager to protect its U.S. network, Hamas has stated that “it’s not in our policy to target Americans or American interests.” However, certain factors could change that strategy. For one, Hamas may facilitate Al Qaeda attacks by “carry[ing] out reconnaissance or serv[ing] as couriers,” as a 2004 FBI affidavit noted. With trained operatives reportedly already in the U.S., Hamas may also decide to directly target “the American enemy.” Angered by the Iraq War and U.S. support for Israeli aggression, Hamas’ top leaders have increasingly warned that the U.S. is in “danger” and threatened that “God declared war against America.” Hamas has been bolstered by Israel’s 2005 withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, which the group views as “the fruits of the Islamic resistance...” In Hamas’ eyes, “this achievement is the beginning of complete and total liberation of our Palestinian land.”

Hamas has also gained considerable confidence in the wake of its convincing 2006 election victory and has intensified its rhetoric. Unfazed by President Bush’s January 26, 2006 statement that Hamas “is a party with which we will not deal,” Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar responded that he could foresee no relationship with the Bush administration: “President Bush is introducing hysteria into the region. He...clearly is pushing the Christian-Zionist agenda -- which is why we cannot deal with him.” In light of conciliatory gestures by the European Union and the United Nations, Zahar also indicated Hamas is unconcerned about the possibility of losing U.S. aid, commenting, “how could we justify taking the money.”

While the ultimate consequences of Hamas' election victory are unclear, Hamas' U.S. supporters may become emboldened in their quest to ensure that "Israel will disappear as the Crusaders and other empires disappeared." As the situation continues to develop, it is critical to remain aware that Al Qaeda is not the only terrorist organization with a presence on American soil.



The preceding report was formulated from various sources. To request a list of references or for questions and comments, please contact the Office of Homeland Security at info@security.state.ny.us or (212) 867 - 7060.