

**COUNTER
EXTREMISM
PROJECT**



**FRIENDS & ENABLERS OF HAMAS:
STATE ACTORS**



PREFACE

Since October 7, 2023—when Hamas led a massacre of 1,200 Israelis and other nationalities—the United States and its Western allies have ramped up long-standing efforts to politically and diplomatically isolate the Palestinian Sunni Islamist group Hamas, an internationally designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) that violently seized control of the Gaza Strip in 2006. The United States has repeatedly stated that Hamas must not play any role in governing any Palestinian-controlled territory. Israel, meanwhile, has sought to eliminate Hamas entirely as a military threat in the Gaza Strip.

However, efforts to degrade Hamas politically and militarily are seriously undermined by ongoing support the group receives from at least six national governments: Iran, Qatar, Turkey, North Korea, Russia, and China.

This support can be organized into three—at times overlapping—categories: (1) diplomatic: conferring political cover and legitimacy, especially on the world stage and in international forums; (2) financial: providing the resources for Hamas to continue governing Gaza, withstand U.S. and Western sanctions, and maintain its military capacity; (3) military: physically transferring weapons and/or weapons technology to Hamas as it

continues to attack Israeli territory and engage in guerilla warfare with Israeli forces operating inside Gaza.

Support for Hamas can be further classified into two tiers of support based upon: (i) ideological and (ii) negotiable motivations.

i. Ideological Support

The most explicit and vocal state supporters of Hamas are Iran, Qatar, and Turkey: the group's primary and well-established international support system, which is sustained by ideological alignment in certain crucial areas. For example, while the Shiite-ruled clerical regime of Iran does not naturally align ideologically with the Sunni ideology of Hamas, both parties share an extreme Islamist interpretation, which puts them in zealous agreement when it comes to their explicitly avowed goal of eliminating Israel.

The governments of Turkey and Qatar, meanwhile, may not openly subscribe to the same annihilationist vision, but they nonetheless strongly support many of the ideological tenets of the Muslim Brotherhood—the Islamist umbrella organization from which Hamas first emerged. They also seek the more ambiguous “liberation of Palestine”—an ambition that may not explicitly call for the elim-

ination of Israel but which may still result in the destruction of the Jewish state.

Both Ankara and Doha also seek the more ambiguous goal of the “liberation of Palestine,” which may not align outright with Hamas’s goal of the total elimination of Israel but may still result in the destruction of Israel as a Jewish state.

ii: Negotiable Support

The second tier of support, which includes North Korea, Russia, and China, is not ideological but negotiable, based upon geostrategic considerations that are much more subject to flux.




















Support for Hamas from Russia and China, in particular, has notably increased over the past 12 months. Adversarial competition with Russia and China’s global peer, the United States—Israel’s key international ally—is a major factor in accounting for this support. Unlike the countries in the first tier, Russia, China, and North Korea do not attach the same ideological weight to the Pal-

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estinian issue. Indeed, Russia and China maintain diplomatic and economic relations with Israel. The support Hamas receives from this secondary tier is therefore far less certain than Hamas’s trio of primary international patrons: it is rooted in ambitions to erode U.S. power, prestige, and influence, rather than in natural ideological opposition to Israel or organic commitment to the Palestinian cause.

Nevertheless, both Hamas’s ideological and negotiable government supporters are largely responsible for its ongoing political survival and military viability.



Main Support to Hamas by Type		Military	Financial	Diplomatic	Ideological
 Iran					
 Qatar					
 Turkey					
 North Korea					
 Russia					
 China					



IDEOLOGICAL SUPPORTERS: IRAN, QATAR, TURKEY



The Iranian regime is Hamas's leading benefactor, providing weapons, training, and money, as well as unwavering diplomatic cover. In October 2023, senior Hamas official Ali Baraka declared that "First and foremost, it is Iran that is giving us money and weapons."¹ Iran's financial relationship with Hamas dates back decades. During the 1990s, Iran was a key financier of Hamas terrorism, providing financial rewards for bombings and higher rewards for higher death tolls.² Iran has since increased its support, providing financing and weapons technology during the Second Intifada (2000-2005) and subsequent wars with Israel.

During the July 2014 Hamas-Israel conflict, Ali Larijani, former speaker of Iran's parliament, revealed that Tehran had transferred technology to Hamas to allow the terror group to build its own rockets.³ In April 2021, Iran reportedly agreed to pay Hamas \$30 million per month for intelligence on Israeli missile capabilities, including their locations.⁴ In January 2022, then Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh revealed Iran had provided the group with \$70 million to develop missiles and defense technology. Haniyeh declared that while multiple countries supported Hamas, Iran was the group's biggest donor.⁵ In April 2024, Israel's military uncovered correspondence between Hamas's then-deputy and now overall leader Yahya Sinwar

and deceased Quds Force deputy leader Marwan Issa detailing almost \$250 million in Iranian payments to Hamas between 2014 and 2020.⁶

In the immediate aftermath of October 7, reports circulated of various levels of Iranian involvement in its planning or providing material support for its preparation. According to a Wall Street Journal report, several senior Hamas and Hezbollah sources confirmed the participation of officials from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in planning the attack in meetings in Beirut in August 2023. According to those officials, the IRGC had provided a greenlight for the attack.⁷ According to documents Israeli forces recovered in Gaza, Hamas's now-deceased leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, had requested an additional \$7 million per month from the IRGC in December 2022 to fund what Hamas called "the big project," referring to the planned October 7 attack. Sinwar and other Hamas leaders attempted to persuade Iran and Hezbollah to join in the attack, but Iranian officials reportedly said they needed more time.⁸ On November 17, 2024, families of Americans killed on October 7 and in subsequent fighting in Gaza filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Washington against Iran for supporting October 7. According to the lawsuit, the IRGC coordinated between Hamas and Hezbollah ahead of the attack.⁹

Though the extent of Iran’s involvement in the planning and financing of October 7 remains undetermined, Iran visibly increased its diplomatic and financial support in October 7’s aftermath as Iranian officials openly praised the attack. On October 9, Iran’s then-President Ebrahim Raisi told the leader of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), which participated in the massacre, “You really made the Islamic community happy with this innovative and victorious operation. The Zionist regime is declining while the resistance front is conquering the peaks of victory.”¹⁰ Just weeks after October 7, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei met with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran. Khamenei reiterated Iran’s support for the Palestinians.¹¹ Khamenei later said on June 3, 2024, that the “region was very much in need of this attack,” which he called “a huge blow to

Israel.”¹² After the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in July 2024, Khamenei said, “We see avenging his blood our duty.”¹³

In retaliation for the killing of Haniyeh and Hezbollah leaders, Iran fired 181 ballistic missiles at Israel on October 1, 2024. The attack killed one Palestinian man and injured two Israelis.¹⁴ Hamas praised the attack, saying, “[Hamas] blesses the heroic rocket launches carried out by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran against wide areas of our occupied lands,” noting that it was “in revenge for the blood of our heroic martyrs.”¹⁵ Iran also previously fired over 300 cruise missiles and drones at Israel on April 13, 2024, in retaliation for Israel’s bombing of Iran’s embassy in Damascus.¹⁶



Qatar

The government of Qatar harbors Hamas officials and has funneled hundreds of millions of dollars into the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. Hamas leaders such as Khaled Meshaal live in luxury-standard accommodation in Doha, as did Hamas politburo chief Ismail Haniyeh until his assassination during a visit to Iran in July 2024.¹⁷ Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani has called Hamas a “legitimate resistance movement” and defended Hamas’s presence in the country as a “political representation of the Hamas movement” meant to promote Palestinian unity.¹⁸

As of November 2024, Hamas’s status in Qatar was in doubt. In early November, U.S. sources reported that Qatar had recently agreed to shut down Hamas’s diplomatic office in the country and to expel Hamas’s leadership. On November 9, the Qatari government announced it was suspending its mediation role between Hamas and Israel, claiming neither side was negotiating in good faith. According to Qatari Foreign Ministry spokesman Majed Al-Ansari, Qatar had notified both parties 10 days earlier that it would suspend mediation if the parties failed to reach an agreement in the current round of negotiations. U.S. sources reported that Qatar would shut down Hamas’s diplomatic office in the country and expel Hamas’s leaders.¹⁹ Later that month, reports emerged that Hamas’s leadership had left Qatar for Turkey. The U.S. government subsequently

warned Turkey against taking in Hamas.²⁰ On November 19, Qatar denied that Hamas’s office in the country had permanently closed. According to Qatari foreign ministry spokesperson Majed Al-Ansari, Hamas’s office in Doha had been created to facilitate negotiations to end the war in Gaza.²¹ Turkey also denied that Hamas had moved its office to the country from Qatar.²² By January 2025, Qatar had resumed its mediation role between Hamas and Israel.²³

While the future of Hamas in Qatar remains unclear, the country has a history of providing support to Hamas. A U.S. lawsuit filed in June 2020 alleged Qatar provided funding to Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Hamas through three Qatari financial institutions, the Qatar Charity, Masraf Al Rayan, and Qatar National Bank.²⁴ After the Palestinian Authority cut its financial support to Gaza in 2017, the Israeli government approved a Qatari plan in August 2018 to fund municipal salaries.²⁵ Qatar began providing \$20 million per month—or \$240,000,000 a year—in aid to the Gaza Strip. The aid helped Hamas pay salaries of its civil servants, as well as pay for electricity costs and food assistance programs. On January 31, 2021, the Qatari government announced it would increase its annual assistance to \$360 million in the coming year.²⁶ After Hamas’s 11-day war with Israel that month, Qatar pledged \$500 million in aid toward Gaza’s reconstruction.²⁷ On November 30, 2021, Hamas, Qatar, and Egypt announced a new deal for Qatar to pay the salaries of Hamas’s public servants in Gaza.²⁸

Qatar continued to send cash to the Hamas-run government up through the October 7 attack. By July 2023, Qatar paid \$30 million per month in stipends to Gaza’s families, energy costs, and public sector salaries. The monthly payments halted in May 2023, resulting in an alleged financial crisis for Hamas.²⁹ Qatar resumed its payments that September in cooperation with the Qatar Fund for Development. As of September 2023, Qatar had contributed more than \$2.1 billion in aid to the Gaza Strip and the Hamas government.³⁰ In December 2023, two months after October 7, Qatari Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Al-Khulaifi told CNN that Qatar intended to continue its payments to Gaza. Al-Khulaifi told CNN that Qatar’s “mandate is our continuous help and support for our brothers and sisters of Palestine. We will continue to do it systematically as we did it before.”³¹ But while Qatari financial support may have received Israel’s approval, Qatar also took a lenient diplomatic approach toward Hamas.

Following October 7, Qatari officials absolved Hamas of any responsibility for the attack and the

expected Israeli reprisals. According to a Qatari government statement, Qatar’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs held Israel “solely responsible for the ongoing escalation due to its ongoing violations of the rights of the Palestinian people, the latest of which was the repeated incursions into Al-Aqsa Mosque under the protection of the Israeli police.”³²

Doha condemned the July 31, 2024, assassination of internationally sanctioned Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said, “Political assassinations and continued targeting of civilians in Gaza while talks continue leads us to ask, how can mediation succeed when one party assassinates the negotiator on the other side? Peace needs serious partners and a global stance against the disregard for human life.”³³ The Qatari foreign ministry termed the killing a “heinous crime” and “shameful assassination,” adding, “This assassination and the reckless Israeli behaviour of continuously targeting civilians in Gaza will lead to the region slipping into chaos and undermine the chances of peace.”³⁴



Turkey

Turkey and Hamas maintain close political and financial ties. According to a December 2019 report in the British media, Hamas has used Istanbul as a planning base for terrorist activities. At least a dozen Hamas members moved to Istanbul in 2019, according to Israeli and Egyptian intelligence. This included U.S.-designated financiers such as Kamal Awad, and military leaders who planned spats of suicide bombings in Israel in the 1990s. Turkey has continued to deny that Hamas is a terrorist organization. Turkish intelligence agents reportedly maintain close contact with Hamas operatives in Istanbul.³⁵ In November 2024, reports emerged that Hamas’s leadership had left Qatar for Turkey. The U.S. government subsequently warned Turkey against taking in Hamas.³⁶ Turkey denied that Hamas had moved its office to the country from Qatar. A Turkish official told Reuters that “Hamas Political Bureau members visit Turkey from time to time,” but Hamas had not moved its political office to the country.³⁷

The Turkish government has welcomed Hamas’s leadership in the country for high-level meetings with Turkish officials, including Turkish President

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who met directly with Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Turkey.³⁸ A 2019 meeting between the two also included Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Arouri. Both Arouri and Haniyeh were under U.S. sanctions and subject to rewards for their arrest. Nonetheless, they moved about freely in Turkey. Following the meeting, Erdoğan told media that Turkey “will keep on supporting our brothers in Palestine.”³⁹ Turkey has also provided Hamas with financial support. The country reportedly planned to donate \$300 million to Gaza’s Hamas government in 2011,⁴⁰ while other reports cited that this would become an annual donation to Hamas.⁴¹

Despite Turkey’s agreements to curb Hamas activities in the country, senior Hamas leaders based in Istanbul have reportedly continued to direct terror operations in Jerusalem and the West Bank from the Turkish city.⁴² In 2018, Hamas reportedly created a secret cyberwarfare and counter-intelligence headquarters in Istanbul.⁴³ In August 2020, Turkey reportedly began granting citizenship to a dozen high-ranking Hamas members in the country. According to the Telegraph, those receiving citizenship were “the most senior Hamas operatives outside of Gaza. [They]

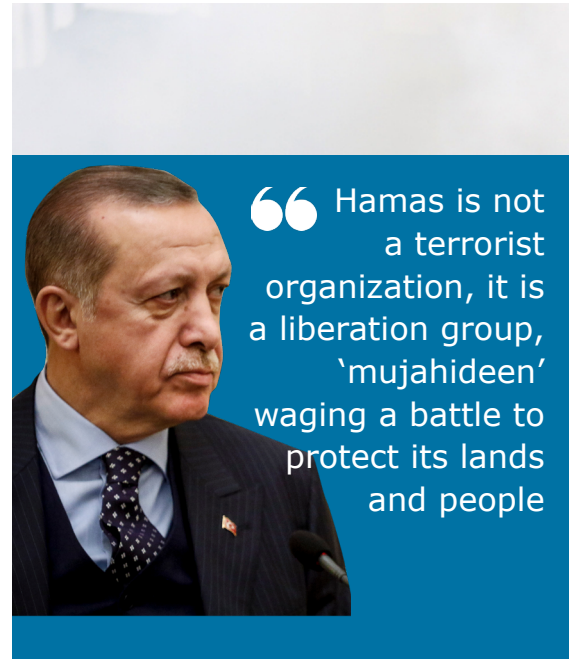
are actively raising funds and directing operatives to carry out attacks in the present day.”⁴⁴ In February and August of 2020, Turkey’s government hosted Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and other Hamas leaders.⁴⁵ Hamas has also used Turkey-based agents and Turkish companies to transfer money and goods to the West Bank and Gaza.⁴⁶ During Hamas’s 21-day conflict with Israel in May 2021, Erdoğan referred to Israel as a “terror state,” while Vice President Fuat Oktay called on Muslim nations to “take a clear stance” against Israel’s strikes on the Gaza Strip.⁴⁷ On November 20, 2021, Haniyeh praised Turkey for its “critical” role providing political support for Hamas and the Palestinian cause.⁴⁸ After Hamas member Sheikh Fadi Abu Shkhaydam killed one and wounded four during a shooting attack in Jerusalem’s Old City that November, Israeli security revealed that Shkhaydam had visited Turkey prior to the attack and allegedly received instructions from Hamas leaders in that country. Shkhaydam’s family denied he had met with Hamas in Turkey, instead claiming he had gone to visit his son who was studying in the country.⁴⁹ Later that month, Israel’s Shin Bet security organization announced it had broken up a Hamas cell in the West Bank and seized explosive belts, weapons, and an undisclosed amount of money.⁵⁰

Erdoğan did not condemn the October 7 attack. Instead, he has repeatedly defended Hamas and castigated Israel for its conduct of the war.⁵¹ On October 25, 2023, he declared, “Hamas is not a terrorist organization, it is a liberation group, ‘mujahideen’ waging a battle to protect its lands and people.”⁵² On May 13, 2024, at a joint press conference with the Greek prime minister, Erdoğan said that calling Hamas a terrorist organization “would sadden us,” replying to comments to that effect by the prime minister. Erdoğan further declared that Turkey does not “deem” Hamas to be a terrorist organization, while more than 1,000 Hamas members are receiving treatment in Turkish hospitals.⁵³

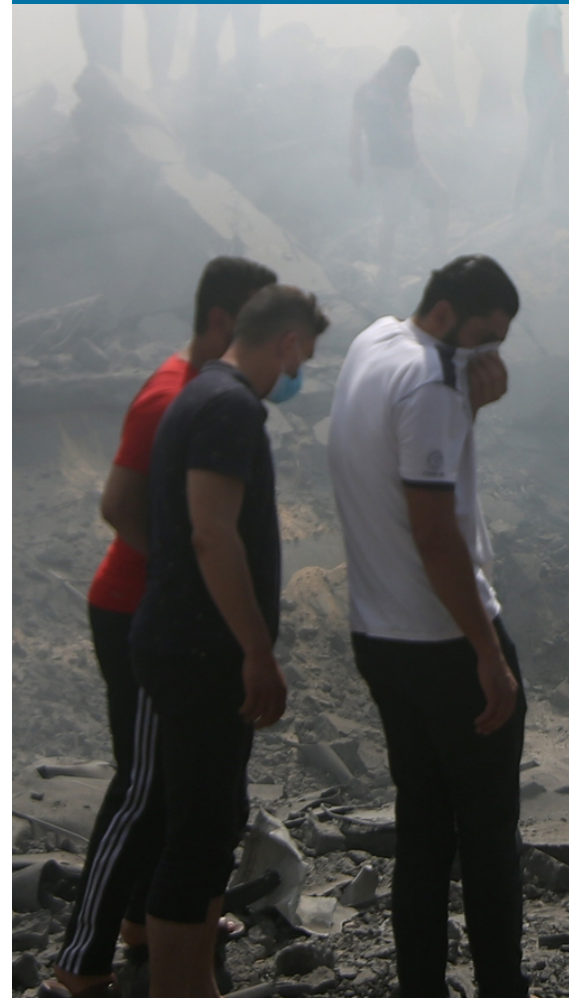
In April 2024, Erdoğan hosted a Hamas delegation headed by Ismail Haniyeh.⁵⁴ Hamas’s Qatar-based leadership reportedly temporarily relocated to Turkey in April and May 2024. According to unnamed Qatari officials cited by the Times of Israel, Qatar’s frustration with Hamas stemmed from the terror group’s refusal to compromise in hostage negotiations with Israel. Per the report, Hamas leaders in Qatar traveled to Turkey and remained for several weeks. The leaders reportedly met with Erdoğan, who praised their fight against Israel. In May, Qatar reportedly told the Hamas leaders they could return to prevent talks from

collapsing altogether.⁵⁵

On July 31, 2024, Erdoğan accused Israel of “Zionist barbarity” for the assassination of Haniyeh. “May God have mercy on my brother Ismail Haniyeh, fallen in martyrdom after this odious attack,” he posted on X, formerly Twitter.⁵⁶ He continued: “This shameful act aims to sabotage the Palestinian cause, the glorious Gazan resistance and our Palestinian brothers’ just fight, and to intimidate Palestinians.”⁵⁷



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NEGOTIABLE SUPPORTERS: NORTH KOREA, RUSSIA, CHINA

North Korea

Hamas has allegedly received arms from North Korea. The link first became public after a cargo of North Korean weapons was seized in Bangkok's airport in 2009. Investigators later confirmed that the cargo was destined for Iran, from where it was to be smuggled to Lebanon and Gaza.

In July 2014, reports indicated that Hamas was attempting to buy arms and communication equipment from North Korea for attacks on Israel. The deal was reportedly worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.⁵⁸

Lebanon-based Hamas official Ali Baraka told Lebanese media in November 2023 that North Korea is part of Hamas's support network. According to Baraka, Iran does not have the military capability for a direct strike on the United States, but North Korea does.⁵⁹ Since October 7, more reports have emerged of North Korean support for Hamas's militant apparatus.

Western security sources also suspect that North Korea has offered Hamas advice on the building of tunnels, which has enabled Hamas to smuggle weapons and fighters in and out of Gaza. An Associated Press analysis with South Korean experts determined that Hamas likely used North Korean F-7 rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) during October 7.⁶⁰ In January 2024, Voice of America's Korean service published images of North Korean F-7 RPGs, inscribed with Korean letters, which Hamas had utilized. South Korea's intelligence agency confirmed several days later that Hamas had made use of North Korean arms during the Gaza war. The Israeli military has also stated that they have discovered arms from North Korea in Gaza and Israel during the conflict.⁶¹

Russia

Russia's support of Hamas stems from the Soviet Union's backing of Arab militants as a method of countering the West during the Cold War. Though Russia today maintains diplomatic and economic ties with Israel, the Soviet Union severed its ties to Israel in 1967 after the Six Day War. Russia did not re-establish relations until 1991, just before the fall of the Soviet Union.⁶² Russia's relationship with Hamas warmed after the group's victory in Palestinian legislative elections in 2006. Russian President Vladimir Putin quickly congratulated Hamas on its election win.⁶³ In 2007, Putin hosted Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal in Moscow.⁶⁴ Russian government representatives have met repeatedly with Hamas officials in the Russian capital.⁶⁵ Russia has never designated Hamas as a terrorist organization.⁶⁶ Following the death of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in a targeted strike in Iran in July 2024, Russia joined Qatar, Turkey, and China in condemning the action.⁶⁷

In the immediate aftermath of the October 7, 2023, massacre, Russian officials said they were "extremely" and "gravely concerned" but framed the attack as part of a "spiral of violence" and a "sharp escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict."⁶⁸ Putin, after keeping silent about the attack for three days, called the war in Gaza "a clear example of the failure of U.S. policy in the Middle East" and failed to condemn the massacre.⁶⁹ On October 13, 2023, Hamas expressed gratitude to Putin for the latter's "position regarding the ongoing Zionist aggression against our people."⁷⁰ Russia hosted a delegation from Hamas, led by senior official Moussa Abu Marzook, on October 26 of that year.⁷¹ Russia has continued to host Hamas officials for state meetings, notably in October 2024.⁷² Further, Russia has also repeatedly voted against U.N. Security Council resolutions condemning Hamas for the attack.⁷³

China

Like Russia, the Chinese government does not label Hamas as a terrorist organization. In 2006, following Hamas's victory in the Palestinian legislative elections, Beijing invited senior Hamas official Mahmoud al-Zahar to the China-Arab Cooperation Forum.⁷⁴

Following October 7, China only condemned the attack after receiving U.S. diplomatic pressure. And even then, it did not specifically mention Hamas or label October 7 an act of terrorism.⁷⁵ China has also repeatedly voted against U.N. Security Council resolutions condemning Hamas for the October 7 attack on Israel.⁷⁶ In January 2024, news media reported that the Israeli military had discovered a sizable stockpile of Chinese arms in the Gaza Strip, including "assault rifles, grenade launchers, and advanced communications equipment," as well as "telescopic sights for rifles, M16 cartridges, listening devices, and tactical military radio."⁷⁷

Since October 7, China has maintained diplomatic relations with Hamas. In February 2024, Hamas officials met with Chinese Ambassador to Qatar Cao Xiaolin. The following month, Chinese diplomat Wang Kejian met with Hamas leader Ismail

Haniyeh in Doha, Qatar. During the meeting, Haniyeh praised China's role in the U.N. Security Council, the United Nations, and the International Court of Justice.⁷⁸ In July 2024, the Chinese government hosted talks between Hamas and 13 other Palestinian factions, including Fatah, which resulted in an agreement to form a Palestinian national unity government. The pact had yet to be implemented as of October 7, 2024, and similar such agreements have collapsed in the past.⁷⁹

Following the death of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in a targeted strike in Iran in July 2024, China joined Qatar, Turkey, and Russia in condemning the action.⁸⁰ In a press conference on October 8, 2024, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning declared reiterated China's support for the Palestinians but also heeded Israel's security needs. "The legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people need to be realized and the reasonable security concerns of Israel need to be paid attention to," she said.⁸¹ Regional observers noted that the statement represented a shift in Beijing's rhetoric as China publicly recognized Israel's legitimate security concerns in Gaza.⁸²

CONCLUSION

Since Hamas violently took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, there has been a concerted effort to isolate the group internationally. Israel's recent peace agreements with multiple Arab neighbors have further increased this isolation.

Despite Israel's military campaign in Gaza, Hamas will continue to survive and even thrive as long as it continues to receive financial and diplomatic support. Iran, Turkey, Qatar, Russia, China, and North Korea have rejected international efforts to isolate Hamas further. This has granted legitimacy to the terror group on the global stage when it should instead face ostracization.

The diplomatic legitimacy these countries continue to bestow upon Hamas undermines efforts to eliminate the group, while Iran's financial support acts as a critical lifeline. Hamas must be deprived of its safe havens, diplomatic relations, and revenue streams, thus removing any normalization of the terror group in international affairs.

Only by achieving total military, financial, and diplomatic isolation can Hamas be effectively defeated.



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