

Hamas' Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades

(Also known as Ezzedeen Al-Qassam Brigades)

The following information is based on publicly available details about Hamas' Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades. These details have been corroborated by material from intelligence investigations into the activities of the Brigades. ASIO assesses that the details set out below are accurate and reliable.

Hamas' Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades (the Brigades) has been proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the government of the United Kingdom. Hamas (including the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades) has been proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the governments of the United States and Canada. Hamas is also listed by the European Union for the purposes of its anti-terrorism financing measures.

Current status of Hamas' Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades

Hamas is a radical Sunni organisation which emerged from the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in late 1987, shortly after the commencement of the first Intifada. The Brigades is the military wing of Hamas and its activities are distinct from the political and community activities of Hamas. The military wing emerged during the first Intifada, with the primary objective of creating a coherent military organisation to further Hamas' aims. In mid 1991, the military wing of Hamas became known as the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades.

While the Brigades constitutes a 'wing' of Hamas, it operates independently and against the publicly stated aims of Hamas. Continued attacks by the Brigades during ceasefire periods in 2005 and 2006 indicate that peace initiatives announced by its parent organisation, Hamas, are not observed or binding on the Brigades. For example, on 29 June 2005, during a ceasefire period, the Brigades claimed credit for rocket attacks against the Israeli settlements of Netzer Hazani and Kissufim. On 26 November 2006, immediately following the commencement of a ceasefire, the Brigades claimed credit for launching rockets at civilian targets inside Israel.

The primary areas of operations for the Brigades are Israel and the Palestinian Territories. The Brigades operates as a network of independent cells directed by the Brigades leadership. Co-ordinating with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Brigades conducted a number of suicide bombings in the mid 1990's in an attempt to derail the Middle East peace process. The Brigades continues to conduct terrorist attacks, including joint operations with other Palestinian groups.

Funding for Hamas largely comes from Palestinian expatriates and supporters in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Arab states. Some of the funds collected are channelled into the Brigades through specific charitable organisations located in the Palestinian Territories, which also provide support to the families of Hamas activists who have been killed. Iran provides some direct financial assistance for Hamas and it is assessed that some funding is channelled to support the operational capacity of the Brigades.

The Brigades has an ongoing intent and capability to conduct terrorist acts. Despite a decline in attacks attributed to the Brigades from late 2005 to mid 2006, the Brigades claimed the launch of hundreds of rockets, missiles and mortar shells in 2006. Attacks and statements by the Brigades indicate its arsenal also includes small arms, explosives and grenades. In April 2007, the spokesman for the Brigades warned that the group remains 'fully prepared' for action. The Brigades continues to claim responsibility for attacks.

Objectives

Hamas aims to establish an Islamic Palestinian state which would include the territory of the current state of Israel. The Brigades engages in terrorist acts in support of Hamas' political objectives.

Leadership and membership

Historically the leadership of the Brigades has been unclear. Following the assassination of Hamas leaders in 2004, the identities of leaders were hidden. However, in September 2005, the Brigades identified its leader, Mohammed Deif, and other senior and geographic commanders of the Brigades.

There is mobility of roles and activities between the civilian, military and welfare elements of Hamas and the Brigades is able to draw candidates for terrorist operations from Hamas-sponsored mosques and facilities.

Hamas' Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades engagement in terrorist activities

Recent terrorist attacks for which responsibility has been claimed by, or reliably attributed to the Brigades, have included:

- July 2006: Two separate rocket attacks on Ashkelon;
- October 2006: Homemade shells fired at Sederot;
- October 2006: Rocket attacks on Ashkelon;
- November 2006: Several separate rocket attacks against civilian targets inside Israel, including Sederot, Ziqim, and the Western Negev;
- May 2007: Rocket attacks against several Israeli locations including Sederot, Kefar Maymon and Nir Oz; and
- June 2007: Five mortar shells fired at Israeli military vehicles and soldiers near the Kissufim Crossing in central Gaza.

Conclusion

The Criminal Code provides that for an organisation to be listed as a terrorist organisation, the Attorney-General must be satisfied that:

- (i) the organisation is directly or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, assisting in or fostering the doing of a terrorist act (whether or not a terrorist act has occurred or will occur); or
- (ii) the organisation advocates the doing of a terrorist act (whether or not a terrorist act has occurred or will occur).

On the basis of the above information, ASIO assesses that Hamas' Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades is directly preparing, planning, assisting in or fostering the doing of terrorist acts. It is submitted that the acts attributable to the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades are terrorist acts as they:

- (i) are done with the intention of advancing a political cause, namely, to end Israeli occupation in Palestine and establish an Islamic state;
- (ii) are intended to coerce or influence by intimidation the government of a foreign country, namely Israel and/or intimidate a section of the public; and
- (iii) constitute acts which cause serious physical harm to persons, including death, as well as serious damage to property.

This assessment is corroborated by information provided by reliable and credible intelligence sources.