

Hamas Diplomacy: From Haniyeh to Sinwar

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



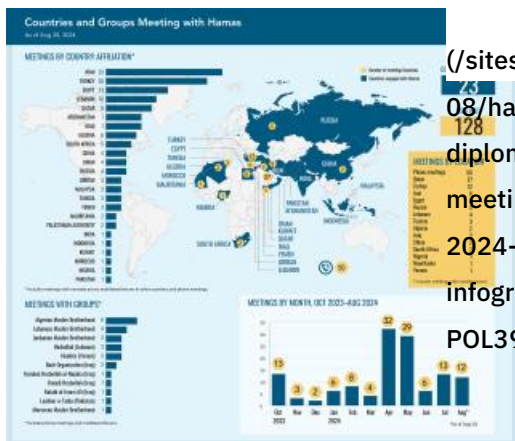
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 Brief Analysis

The group has sought to build legitimacy and prepare for a postwar role in Gaza by engaging with various countries since October, but the death of Ismail Haniyeh will complicate those efforts.

After conducting the world’s largest terrorist attack since 9/11 and sparking a tragically destructive war in Gaza, Hamas has spent months conducting a diplomatic campaign to garner support and gain political cover on the world stage. These efforts increase the chances that the group will remain a key actor in the Palestinian arena after the war, potentially undermining Israel’s pledge to eradicate or at least defang it. Yet the recent assassination of Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh—who took part in nearly three-fourths of its diplomatic engagements during the war—will likely complicate its future charm offensives.



(/sites/default/files/2024-08/hamas-diplomatic-meetings-2024-infographic-POL3921.jpg)

Who Is Meeting with Hamas?

ince the October 7 attack, Hamas has regularly promoted its diplomatic meetings with foreign officials, political

parties, local NGOs, and other groups via its official Telegram channels and website. As of August 28, it had engaged in 128 such meetings either in person or via phone (or 134 if one includes each country's presence at a multilateral engagement). Twenty-three countries were involved in these meetings, whether in the form of government officials, political parties, or nonstate actors that operate within their borders. In contrast, Hamas had only 37 diplomatic engagements in the year prior to the October 7 attacks, meaning it is on pace for a fivefold annual increase.

All of Hamas' encounters served various purposes: congratulating Hamas for the October 7 attack, publicly supporting its claims, as well as calling for an end to Israel's military campaign, greater humanitarian access to Gaza, and a ceasefire agreement. In other cases, Hamas appeared to avoid heavily publicizing certain engagements due to apparent political sensitivities—for example, when it [opened \(https://x.com/azelin/status/1800828321355514111\)](https://x.com/azelin/status/1800828321355514111) a political office in Iraq in June or [met with \(https://x.com/majidsnizami/status/1825134854897295733\)](https://x.com/majidsnizami/status/1825134854897295733) the Pakistani terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba in August.

Unsurprisingly, the meetings also show that Iran is the group's biggest diplomatic backer, not just its main military patron. The Islamic Republic was the first country to congratulate Hamas on the October 7 attack and has steadfastly supported it via numerous phone conversations and in-person meetings in Tehran and Qatar. Among other issues, the two allies have discussed broad strategic matters and specific responses to Israel's actions in Gaza and regionally.

Elsewhere, Qatar and Turkey have served as key venues for supporting Hamas diplomacy. Doha also provides a safe space for the group to meet with other Palestinian militants fighting Israel, most recently hosting talks between members of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad on August 22. Egypt has played an important role in Hamas diplomacy as well—but as an intermediary in negotiations with Israel, not as an ally of the group.

In other countries, Hamas has often met with a range of actors, from elected officials and groups that have representation in the government to designated terrorist groups (in some cases, all of these labels apply). For example, meetings in Iraq and Lebanon have included the Badr Organization, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, Kataib Hezbollah, Kataib al-Imam Ali, Lebanese Hezbollah, and the [Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/muslim-brothers-give-hamas-foothold-lebanon\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/muslim-brothers-give-hamas-foothold-lebanon) (notably, most of these groups are backed by Iran). In Jordan and Morocco, Hamas did not meet with royal officials, just members of local Muslim Brotherhood branches (which hold parliamentary seats). In Pakistan and Yemen, it only engaged with Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Houthis, respectively.

Beyond its traditional allies, Hamas has also engaged politicians and civil society actors in various parts of Africa to garner greater international support:

- During a week-long diplomatic marathon in Algiers this February, Hamas described meeting with “thirty political parties and ten associations, and holding meetings with media outlets and Algerian notables.”
- In Tunisia, Hamas participated in group forums in January and May while meeting with political actors and unions across the spectrum, from leftists to Islamist factions like Ennahda.
- In Mauritania, Hamas leader Khaled Mashal gave a speech at a November festival in support of the Palestinian cause.
- In Nigeria, Hamas conducted a four-day visit in February that included meeting with political officials and religious actors to explain the situation in Gaza.
- In South Africa, Hamas officials conducted multiple trips to Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria, and Johannesburg, meeting with various political actors (e.g., the African National Congress), local NGOs, and religious figures. The aim of these visits was twofold: to share details on the Gaza war, and to link the group's cause to South Africa's experience under apartheid. In April, Haniyeh met with Nelson Mandela's grandson—Zweliwele “Mandla” Mandela, a convert to Islam—

in Istanbul to further link their causes.

Notably, a large proportion of the group's diplomatic meetings in recent years have been conducted by phone rather than in person (e.g., 40 percent during the war, 33 percent the previous year). Although the restrictions on travel to or from Gaza may partially explain this trend (especially during wartime), it also suggests that questions persist about the group's legitimacy. Despite its claims to the contrary, Hamas is not the officially recognized leader of the Palestinian national movement; that role still belongs to Fatah via the Palestinian Authority. In contrast, another nationally focused jihadist actor—the Taliban's Islamic Emirate—**conducts** [\(<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/looking-legitimacy-talibans-diplomacy-campaign>\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/looking-legitimacy-talibans-diplomacy-campaign) most of its diplomacy in person and inside its territory, despite lacking formal UN recognition as the government of Afghanistan. The differences are clear: the Taliban controls all of Afghanistan, has a monopoly over national politics, and is not restricted by a de facto blockade on its territory.

Thus, even as Hamas measurably expands its diplomatic activity during the war, there remains a ceiling on how far this engagement can potentially go for now. Haniyeh's death will likely lower this ceiling, and quite literally—his role as head of the Hamas Political Bureau has been taken over by military commander Yahya al-Sinwar, who continues to prosecute the war from bunkers and tunnels beneath Gaza.

Public Diplomacy

In addition to meetings abroad, Hamas has sought to sway public opinion about the October 7 attack in writing, most prominently with a January publication it titled “This Is Our Narrative: Why al-Aqsa Flood?” This document attempts to justify the group's mass murder of civilians and underplay its involvement in rape and other war crimes. To make sure the message reached as large an audience as possible, Hamas promptly translated the document from Arabic to English, French, Farsi, Russian, Malay, Urdu, Chinese, Turkish, and Spanish.

The group has also attempted to situate itself as the sole voice on Palestine, in part by praising countries for taking actions it perceives as beneficial to the Palestinian cause. For example, Hamas has:

- Thanked the [African Union](https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/02/18/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-final-statement-issued-by-the-37th-african-union-summit/) (<https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/02/18/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-final-statement-issued-by-the-37th-african-union-summit/>) and [Arab League](https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/16/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-final-statement-issued-by-the-thirty-third-arab-summit-held-in-the-sister-kingdom-of-bahrain/) (<https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/16/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-final-statement-issued-by-the-thirty-third-arab-summit-held-in-the-sister-kingdom-of-bahrain/>) for backing its struggle;
- Thanked [Armenia](https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/06/21/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-announcement-by-the-republic-of-armenia-on-officially-recognizing-the-state-of-palestine/) (<https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/06/21/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-announcement-by-the-republic-of-armenia-on-officially-recognizing-the-state-of-palestine/>), [the Bahamas](https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/08/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-decision-announced-by-the-government-of-the-bahamas-to-recognize-the-state-of-palestine/) (<https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/08/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-decision-announced-by-the-government-of-the-bahamas-to-recognize-the-state-of-palestine/>), [Ireland](https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/22/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-announcement-by-norway-ireland-and-spain-of-recognizing-the-state-of-palestine/) (<https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/22/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-announcement-by-norway-ireland-and-spain-of-recognizing-the-state-of-palestine/>), [Norway](https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/22/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-announcement-by-norway-ireland-and-spain-of-recognizing-the-state-of-palestine/) (<https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/22/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-announcement-by-norway-ireland-and-spain-of-recognizing-the-state-of-palestine/>), [Slovenia](https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/30/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-announcement-by-the-government-of-slovenia-of-its-approval-of-the-decision-to-recognize-the-state-of-palestine/) (<https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/30/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-announcement-by-the-government-of-slovenia-of-its-approval-of-the-decision-to-recognize-the-state-of-palestine/>), [Spain](https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/22/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-announcement-by-norway-ireland-and-spain-of-recognizing-the-state-of-palestine/) (<https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/22/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-announcement-by-norway-ireland-and-spain-of-recognizing-the-state-of-palestine/>), and [Trinidad and Tobago](https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/03/new-statement-from-hamas-we-welcome-the-) (<https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/03/new-statement-from-hamas-we-welcome-the->

[announcement-by-the-government-of-trinidad-and-tobago-to-recognize-the-state-of-palestine/](#)) for recognizing a Palestinian state post-October 7;

- Praised [Bolivia \(https://muqawamalogy.com/2023/10/31/new-statement-from-hamas-we-highly-value-bolivias-severing-of-its-diplomatic-relations-with-the-occupying-entity/\)](#), [Brazil \(https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/02/18/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-appreciate-the-statement-of-brazilian-president-lula-da-silva/\)](#), [Chad \(https://muqawamalogy.com/2023/11/05/new-statement-from-hamas-we-welcome-the-republic-of-chads-summoning-of-the-charge-daffaires-of-its-embassy-in-the-nazi-regime/\)](#), [Chile \(https://muqawamalogy.com/2023/11/01/new-statement-from-hamas-we-appreciate-the-announcement-by-the-republics-of-chile-and-colombia-of-withdrawing-their-ambassadors-from-the-zionist-entity/\)](#), [Colombia \(https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/01/new-statement-from-hamas-we-highly-value-the-position-of-colombian-president-gustavo-petro-who-announced-the-severing-of-diplomatic-relations-with-the-occupying-zionist-entity/\)](#), [Honduras \(https://muqawamalogy.com/2023/11/04/new-statement-from-hamas-we-welcome-the-position-of-the-state-of-honduras-which-recalled-its-ambassador-to-the-nazi-zionist-entity/\)](#), [South Africa \(https://muqawamalogy.com/2023/11/06/new-statement-from-hamas-we-welcome-the-position-of-the-south-african-government-which-recalled-its-ambassador-to-the-criminal-zionist-entity/\)](#), and [Turkey \(https://muqawamalogy.com/2023/11/04/new-statement-from-hamas-we-welcome-the-decision-of-the-republic-of-turkey-to-withdraw-its-ambassador-from-the-criminal-zionist-entity/\)](#) for breaking ties with Israel post-October 7;
- Congratulated [South Africa \(https://muqawamalogy.com/2023/12/30/new-statement-from-hamas-we-highly-appreciate-that-south-africa-has-submitted-a-request-to-the-international-court-of-justice-to-begin-investigation-procedures-against-the-criminal-zionist-entity/\)](#) for opening a “genocide” case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, and praised [Egypt \(https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/12/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-appreciate-the-announcement-by-the-sisterly-arab-republic-of-egypt-of-its-intention-to-join-the-lawsuit-filed-by-the-republic-of/\)](#), [Libya \(https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/05/11/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-appreciate-the-decision-of-the-libyan-presidential-council-to-join-the-lawsuit-filed-by-the-republic-of-south-africa-before-the-i/\)](#), [Spain \(https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/06/06/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-spains-announcement-of-its-joining-the-lawsuit-submitted-by-south-africa-before-the-international-court-of-justice/\)](#), and [Turkey \(https://muqawamalogy.com/2024/08/07/new-statement-from-hamas-we-in-the-islamic-resistance-movement-welcome-the-decision-of-the-republic-of-turkey-to-join-the-genocide-case-in-the-international-court-of-justice/\)](#) for subsequently joining the case.

After Haniyeh

In the months after the October 7 attack, Haniyeh took part in 73 percent of Hamas’s publicly announced diplomatic engagements. How will the group fill this gap now that he is gone?

Of course, at least some Hamas engagements are likely conducted out of the public view, so Haniyeh’s outside role may not represent the full picture. As noted above, however, naming Sinwar as his successor will necessarily complicate the group’s diplomatic activities—meeting with the commander in person will likely be impossible even if officials wanted to take that risk, and speaking with him by phone is likely difficult as well because it could reveal where he is hiding. Some diplomacy could plausibly be done via couriers, but that is no substitute for the in-person legitimacy that Haniyeh was seemingly helping Hamas rebuild with certain constituencies.

Policy Recommendations

The Biden administration can and should continue pushing for a Gaza ceasefire regardless of who is representing

T Hamas. Yet the group's decision to situate its political and military power in one person could impede such efforts, making the war more likely to drag on.

Washington should also do more to curb the major increase in Hamas diplomatic engagement on the world stage—otherwise, the group could wind up being legitimized as the sole voice of Palestine despite starting a destructive war and losing much of its infrastructure in Gaza. For example, the State Department could exert far more pressure on U.S. allies and partners that host or meet with Hamas. If private conversations or official demarches do not have the desired effect, the administration may need to call these countries out publicly.

Aaron Zelin is the Levy Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute. ❖

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Another One-Day War? What the Latest Hezbollah-Israel Clash Reveals About Deterrence and Escalation](#)

Aug 27, 2024

◆
Ben Fishman,
Hanin Ghaddar,
Assaf Orion,
Dennis Ross

[\(/policy-analysis/another-one-day-war-what-latest-hezbollah-israel-clash-reveals-about-deterrence-and\)](#)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[All of Libya Held Hostage by Gunmen Targeting the Central Bank](#)

Aug 22, 2024

◆
Ben Fishman

[\(/policy-analysis/all-libya-held-hostage-gunmen-targeting-central-bank\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Even After Houthi Attacks, Russia-Linked Tankers Return to Red Sea

Aug 22, 2024



Noam Raydan

(/policy-analysis/even-after-houthi-attacks-russia-linked-tankers-return-red-sea)

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