

Monographs

Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad

[Matthew Levitt](#)

ISBN: 0300110537

Publisher: [Yale University Press](#)

Buy: [Amazon](#)

April 2006

How does a group that operates terror cells and espouses violence become a ruling political party? Can a single organization be committed to political activism and charitable good works while simultaneously dispatching suicide bombers to attack civilian targets? How is the world to understand and respond to Hamas, the militant Islamist organization that Palestinian voters brought to power in the stunning election of January 2006?

This important book provides the most complete and fully documented assessment of Hamas ever written. Matthew Levitt, a counterterrorism expert with extensive field experience in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, draws aside the veil of legitimacy behind which Hamas hides. He presents concrete, detailed evidence from an extensive array of international intelligence materials, including recently declassified CIA, FBI, and Department of Homeland Security reports.

In the book, Levitt demolishes what he terms "the myth of disparate wings." The notion that Hamas's military, political, and social "wings" are distinct from one another is belied by ample evidence. In fact, the records show, Hamas meets in the mosques and hospitals it maintains to plan terror attacks, buries caches of arms and explosives under its own schoolyard playgrounds, and transfers and launders funds for terrorist activity through local charity committees. This book catalogues the alarming extent to which Hamas' political and social welfare leaders support terror.

Drawing a portrait of unprecedented accuracy, Matthew Levitt exposes the real Hamas: an organization that threatens peace and security far beyond the borders of the West Bank and Gaza. Levitt urges the international community to take heed, and he offers well-considered ideas for countering the threat Hamas poses.

This book was written while Matthew Levitt was a senior fellow and director of terrorism studies at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. The views expressed by the author are not necessarily those of the Department of the Treasury or the United States government.

- Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad was a 2007 Top Seller in Politics and Law, as compiled by YBP Library Services.
- Selected as a 2007 AAUP University Press Book for Public and Secondary School Libraries.

Related Articles & Events

An article titled "Could Hamas Target the West," adapted from the chapter of the same name in Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad, appeared in the November 2007 issue of Studies in Conflict and Terrorism. [Read the full text of this article \(PDF\).](#)

The Britain Israel Communications & Research Centre and the Royal Institute of International Affairs cohosted a talk by Matthew Levitt about Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad. [Listen to his remarks.](#)

Read Excerpts from the Book

[Read Institute counselor and Ziegler distinguished fellow Dennis Ross's foreword](#) in PDF format.

FROM THE INTRODUCTION: THE MYTH OF DISPARATE WINGS

As a result of the heightened focus on exposing terrorist networks in the post-9/11 global environment, investigators have revealed how terrorist groups systematically conceal their activities behind charitable, social, and political fronts. Indeed, many of these fronts have seen their officials arrested, their assets seized, and their offices shut down by authorities. Still, Hamas benefits from an ostensible distinction drawn by some analysts

between its "military" and "political" or "social" wings. Analysts who make such a distinction regularly dwell on the good works of Hamas, rarely looking at the connections between these activities and the attacks on civilians and the suicide bombings that are the organization's trademark. Because of the notion that Hamas has independent "wings," its political and charitable fronts are allowed to operate openly in many Western and Middle Eastern capitals. In these cities, Islamic social welfare groups tied to Hamas are often tolerated when their logistical and financial support for Hamas is conducted under the rubric of charitable or humanitarian assistance.

While convenient for Hamas and its supporters, this distinction is contradicted by the consistent if scattered findings of investigators, journalists, and analysts. A review of the evidence regarding the integration of Hamas' political activism, social services, and terrorism demonstrates the centrality of the group's overt activities to the organization's ability to recruit, indoctrinate, train, fund, and dispatch suicide bombers to attack civilian targets.

The social welfare organizations of Hamas answer to the same political leaders who play hands-on roles in Hamas terrorist attacks. In some cases, the mere existence of these institutions is invoked to classify Hamas as a social welfare rather than a terrorist organization. To debunk these specious assumptions, it is necessary to fully expose what Hamas calls the *dawa* (its social welfare and proselytization network). This is sometimes difficult because, as one U.S. official explained, "Hamas is loosely structured, with some elements working clandestinely and others working openly through mosques and social service institutions to recruit members, raise money, organize activities, and distribute propaganda."

[Read the entire introduction](#) in PDF format.

FROM THE CONCLUSION: PALESTINE'S 'PARTY OF GOD'

Analysts expected Hamas to fare well in the January 2006 elections, but no one -- including Hamas -- anticipated it would emerge as the dominant political party and form a ruling cabinet. Overnight, Hamas went from planning how to operate as a parliamentary opposition to President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party to being asked by Abbas to form a cabinet and appoint a prime minister. But Hamas has a course to follow as it attempts to navigate the political waters between its rigidly conservative ideology, its stated intention to continue carrying out attacks, its need to actually govern, and Western calls for divorcing politics and violence. As it calculates how to balance these apparently competing interests, Hamas will look north to Lebanon's Hezbollah (Party of God) for a working model of a militant Islamist group that balances its political, charitable, and violent activities.

Although its presence in the Lebanese government is small, Hezbollah has held seats in the Lebanese parliament since 1992 and, in the wake of elections that followed Lebanon's 2005 "Cedar Revolution," the party joined the ruling coalition and assumed a cabinet seat. Despite its participation in mainstream Lebanese politics, Hezbollah maintains a large, independent militia deployed throughout southern Lebanon, as well as one of the most formidable international terrorist capabilities under the direction of Imad Mughniyeh, one of the FBI's most-wanted terrorists. Like Hamas, Hezbollah seeks to Islamize Lebanese society (though in its case to the Shi'a branch of Islam) and destroy Israel. And like Hezbollah, Hamas is loath to forgo its jihadist agenda for the sake of political participation.

Indeed, for Hamas and Hezbollah alike political participation is just another means -- alongside good works and militancy -- to achieve their goals. Even were Hamas to agree to a long-term *hudna* with Israel, this would not indicate an end to its struggle against Israel but a shift in the prioritization of its means of doing so.

[Read the entire conclusion](#) in PDF format.