

COMMENT 261

Pakistan's military support of Hamas terror

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As part of the Global Jihad machinery, Hamas enjoys support not only from international non-state actors but also by countries involved in state-sponsorship of terrorism. According to Middle East expert [James M. Dorsey](#), Hamas leaders, including Khaled Mishaal and [de facto leader](#) Ismail Haniyeh, are based in Qatar', which since 2012 also hosts a '[political office](#)' of the terror organisation. It is known that both [Iran and Turkey](#) play a central role in Hamas' regional support network. It [is not surprising](#) that Pakistan – one of the greatest sponsors of cross-border terrorism and a hub of global Jihadist organisations – contributed to the military build-up of Hamas. Islamabad's support for the Hamas terrorists goes beyond the simply lending of '[moral, diplomatic and political support](#)'; this is common sense. Yet the phenomenon [remains under-studied](#). As stressed in an earlier [SADF Comment](#), Hamas has its ideological roots in Pakistan. It is not only organically linked with Islamabad, but also deeply entrenched in its Jihadist patterns. In fact, [before 9/11](#), the open 'publicising jihad was part of the Pakistan Army's image building exercise to present itself as fighting worldwide for the glory of Islam.' The country's government, military and intelligence celebration of the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban – hailed as a '[strategic victory](#)' worthy of a [parliamentary eulogy](#) of Osama bin Laden by the then Prime Minister Imran Khan – underlines that Jihadism is an essential part of Pakistan's political culture.

The Pakistani leadership identified itself as [the spearhead of](#) 'supporting the Palestinian cause as part of their duty towards the Ummah' (the whole Muslim community) which the security agency interpreted as a carte blanche for propping up the Hamas terrorist group. Khan's administration '[has made several anti-Semitic](#)

[remarks in the past](#), including a [demand](#) from the parliamentarian Moulana Abdul Akbar Chitrali that the Pakistani government should call for a Jihad against Israel, opining that the Jewish state should be [nuked](#). [According to](#) Fabien Baussart, from the think tank Center of Political and Foreign Affairs, the ‘links with Hamas go back to the time when international sanctions were imposed on Hamas because of its refusal to denounce violence against Israel. At that time, Pakistan offered \$3 million as aid for the Palestinian Authority and support for Hamas.’ Pakistan is apparently willing to provide much more support, but due to the country’s apparent constraints imposed on it by geographical distance (lack of direct access), economic crises and missing financial capacities, concrete opportunities to support Hamas in material and financial terms remains limited. Additionally, Islamabad tries to avoid establishing ‘[a direct official link with Hamas](#)’ to avoid diplomatic difficulties with Washington, a crucial donor of military aid for Pakistan. This would most likely create further liabilities in the tense US-Pakistan ties. These factors explain why the Hamas-Pakistan link remained off the radar of many international observers. Nevertheless, military training, and even some technology and equipment transfer, by Pakistan to Hamas might have taken place. A couple of happenings are apparently triggering an increasing number of reports on the Pakistani Army’s engagement with Hamas.

[In 2021](#), ex-Senator and former Pakistani Envoy Raja Zafar ul Haq, who serves currently as the chairman of the Pakistan Muslim League-N (one of the major political parties in the country), highlighted that Pakistan is involved in training terrorists linked to Hamas. [Sources](#) in the Israeli government confirm that its intelligence unveiled deep connections between Pakistan and Hamas. Zafar ul-Haq, who was close to former military dictator general Zia ul-Haq, is [known to have](#) ‘close links not just with the military establishment in Pakistan but also with Islamist groups around the world.’ An [image](#) on social media platforms recently appeared showing ‘Hamas terrorists undergoing training at the Pakistan Army’s Special Service Group (SSG) training camp in Cherat.’ So far, the picture could be not independently verified. Matthew Levitt [states](#) that ‘[i]n 1997 a group of five Hamas dawa (Islamic-missionary) activists travelled to Pakistan for religious training. One of them, Nabil Aukal¹, was recruited by a Palestinian jihadist for

¹ Nabil Aukal denies that he received military training in Pakistan or Afghanistan and insists that he traveled to the region ‘[only for religious reasons](#).’ However, Levitt [stresses](#) that Aukal ‘was recruited

military training, first in an al-Ansar camp in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir and then in al Qaeda's Derunta training camp in Afghanistan.' In April 1998, Aukal [returned](#) to Gaza to establish a terrorist cell. In its revelation, Zafar ul-Haq disclosed that the co-founder of Fatah in Gaza, Abu Jihad, had told him that a significant number of ' Hamas fighters had received military training by the Pakistan Army.'² The veteran politician also [claimed](#) 'that the Pakistani Army had a Commando Unit specifically stationed in Gaza for the cause.' These accusations, if true, would have far-reaching impingements, as [they suggest](#) a long-standing and intense relationship between Hamas terrorists and the Pakistani army.

There has been no official Pakistani response to Haq's remarks. Obviously, Islamabad wants to brush its collaboration with Hamas under the carpet. When neglecting Pakistani involvement in terrorism fails, officials try to explain it away – these incidences are then allegedly related '[to private individuals and not linked to the State](#)'. There are also reported instances that Pakistan serves as a recruiting base for the Hamas. [Under interrogation](#), Al Jazeera journalist Samer 'Allawi admitted he had been recruited by Hamas in Pakistan in 1993.' [According to](#) the Shin Bet, Israel's intelligence agency, 'Allawi agreed to carry out military or organisational activity as required by Hamas,' the Shin Bet said in a statement.'

Today, Pakistan stands at a crossroad. It is grappling with the consequences from its decade-long support for Jihadists – the domestic political turmoil caused by radicalised religious extremists, a deteriorating security situation, and the miserable shape of the country's economy are just a few factors. The [affinity](#) for Hamas among the government and people in Pakistan is strong. There are no real signs that Islamabad is willing to break up with its traditional policy patterns of exporting instability and become a responsible member of the international community. One should not expect Pakistan to start 'doing things that normal states do to expand their influence' beyond its borders. Instead, it will continue to use asymmetric methods, namely terrorism, to achieve strategic policy goals. In consequence, it's time to hold Pakistan accountable over its support for terrorist groups, like Hamas. We need to monitor closely the Pakistan-Hamas nexus.

in February 1998 for military training in the al-Qaeda camps of Afghanistan' and that he came back for another training trip to Pakistan and Afghanistan with one of his recruits from Gaza.

² In a [video](#) he stated, '[i]n 1981 when I met Abu Jihad, he said that whenever there is a conflict with Israel, the ones who fight the bravest are the ones who have been trained in Pakistan. And they have been given military training. Even now it is happening.'

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