



# Global Islamism Monitor No. 106

January 8, 2024 **Ilan I. Berman**

**Related Categories:** Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Warfare; Border Security; Afghanistan; Israel; Middle East

## A RADICALIZED PALESTINIAN "STREET"...

On October 7, 2023, the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas carried out a brazen large-scale incursion into southern Israel, breaching the border fence separating the Gaza Strip from the Jewish state. What followed was a systematic assault on multiple Israeli communities and the mass killing of civilians, resulting in the worst slaughter of Jews to take place since the Holocaust. The ensuing Israeli incursion into the Gaza Strip has now lasted for more than three months, and Israeli officials remain committed to the twin (albeit contradictory) goals of rescuing Israeli hostages taken by the group and removing Hamas from power in Gaza, where it has wielded control since 2007. More and more, however, international conversation has turned to the future of Gaza, and what shape governance there will take once the current Israeli offensive eventually winds down.

The vast majority of those conversations are predicated upon the idea that Hamas is deeply unpopular, and would quickly be rejected by the Palestinian "street" should a viable alternative be presented. But, as a December poll by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research has found, the situation is substantially more complicated. The survey, carried out among more than 1,200 Palestinian adults in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, found that support for Hamas has surged in the West Bank and risen modestly in Gaza in recent weeks, while backing for Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas and his Fatah faction has declined significantly, with some two-thirds of those polled now calling for the Palestinian Authority's "dissolution."

The study, moreover, found broad public support for Hamas' terror campaign, with nearly three-quarters of respondents approving of the terror group's actions on October 7th. Moreover, the poll results note, overall "[s]upport for armed struggle" against Israel has risen "ten percentage points compared to three months ago, with more than 60% saying it is the best means of ending the Israeli occupation." In the West Bank, meanwhile, the results were even more pronounced, with support for violence rising "to close to 70%." Tellingly, the support evidenced for Hamas appeared to be predicated, at least in part, upon the fact that the majority of respondents either did not know or did not believe that Hamas had carried out mass atrocities such as rape and summary executions in its October 7th campaign of terror. (PCPSR, December 13, 2023)

## ...COMPLICATES ISRAEL'S PLANS FOR THE "DAY AFTER"

The current state of play – and popular sentiment – in the Palestinian Territories is of enormous significance as Israel (responding to pressure from the international community) begins planning in earnest for a "day after" in Gaza. In late December, Israeli National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi penned an editorial in the Saudi newspaper *Elaph* laying out his government's thinking regarding what comes next after the Israel-Hamas war. Israel, Hanegbi made clear, is seeking to prop up a "moderate Palestinian entity" to govern Gaza in lieu of Hamas – refuting Western pressure that Abbas' Palestinian Authority take charge of the situation. "Israel is aware of the desire of the international community to integrate the Palestinian Authority into the Gaza Strip the day after the fall of Hamas," he wrote. "We make it clear that for this to happen, the PA will have to undergo a fundamental reform." (*Jerusalem Post*, December 22, 2023)

## NEW SIGNS OF LIFE TO AL-QAEDA

The current Israel-Hamas conflict, meanwhile, has given new breathing room – and new motivation – to the Bin Laden network. In a recent English-language video released on the internet, AQAP, al-Qaeda's Arabian branch, announced a number of new initiatives. These include threats to the New York City energy grid and subway system, as well as a relaunch of its English-language magazine, *Inspire*, which has been on hiatus since 2017. A subsequent video released by the group called on supporters to take revenge on the West for Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza, as well as containing instructions for building concealed bombs on airplanes and identified prominent Americans – including Microsoft founder Bill Gates and billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk – as viable targets. (*Foreign Desk News*, January 4, 2024)

## **THE TALIBAN'S WAR ON WOMEN, CONTINUED**

When it roared back to power in Kabul in 2021, Afghanistan's Taliban promised that its new Islamist regime would be a kinder, gentler counterpoint to the first time it held power (1996-2001). It has not taken long, however, for the movement to revert to type, imposing extensive restrictions on female education and prohibiting Afghan women from holding prominent public positions. The Taliban, however, appears not to be content to stop there. The group is now reviving a crackdown on female dress, and in recent days has carried out a number of arrests in the country's capitol of women deemed to be wearing "bad hijab" at variance with the styles and modesty preferred by authorities. (Associated Press, January 4, 2024)