

UK to designate Hamas a terrorist organisation

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Home Secretary, Priti Patel, has announced her plans to declare both the political and military wings of the Palestinian authority in Gaza, Hamas, a terrorist organisation and make it illegal for anyone in the UK to support it.

The move is a progression on previous motions which has already seen the military wing of the group, the Izzedine al-Qassam, banned in the UK. Now, the government is seeking to declare the entirety of the group illegal after an assessment by the Home Secretary concluded that the distinction between Hamas' political and military wings was artificial.

Hamas is now one of 78 terrorist groups denoted under the Terrorism Act 2000 with the Home Secretary planning to introduce a maximum 14-year prison sentence for

anyone convicted of belonging to or supporting the group to come into force on 26th November.

Hamas originated in 1988 after the beginning of the first Palestinian intifada as an opposition group to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The group has gained notoriety for its use of violence against Israel in the struggle for Palestinian freedom. In May, footage of Hamas rockets looming over Israel's tourist city, Tel Aviv, garnered international attention. The rockets, launched from the Gaza Strip, were intercepted by Israel's US-funded 'Iron Dome'. Decades of conflict between Israel and Palestine has prompted human rights groups to accuse both sides of having committed war crimes.

In a speech on security and counter terrorism in Washington D.C. last week, Patel elaborated her position, stating: "Hamas has significant terrorist capability, including access to extensive and sophisticated

weaponry as well as terrorist training facilities, and it has long been involved in significant terrorist violence".

The UK joins the Western condemnation of Hamas, following in the footsteps of the EU and US who have already deemed the group as an outlawed terrorist organisation.

While the UK has maintained a policy of "no contact" with the group's political wing, the official interdiction has solidified the stance of the Conservatives who have now drawn a new line between themselves and the Labour left who have previously shown support for the Palestinian cause.

Israel has shown its support of the UK's "significant decision" as Foreign Minister, Yair Lapid, explained: "There is no legitimate part of a terrorist organisation, and any attempt to differentiate between parts of a terrorist organisation is artificial."

However, the move now aligns



Change of stance: Under Patel's plan the Home Office will designate the whole of Hamas, and not just its military wing, a terrorist organisation.
Source: Canley (via. Wikimedia Commons)

the UK against those calling for the liberation of Palestine. Hamas is considered the political authority in Gaza after winning legislative elec-

tions in 2006. Some view this newest move as a further example of lobbying of Conservative MPs who share deep ties with Israel.