



Hamas: A Threat Beyond the Middle East

Ghada Soliman



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Hamas: A Threat Beyond the Middle East

By Ghada Soliman

SYNOPSIS

One major security issue under Phase One of the Gaza peace plan brokered by the United States in October 2025 is the release of approximately 2,000 Palestinian prisoners, including around 250 Hamas members said to be serving life sentences for deadly terrorist attacks. Given their violent backgrounds, their resettlement in countries such as Qatar, Turkey and Malaysia could raise security concerns and carry significant implications for the affected regions, including Southeast Asia.

COMMENTARY

As part of the Gaza peace plan and an earlier Israel-Hamas ceasefire [brokered in January 2025](#), thousands of Palestinian prisoners [have been released](#) from Israeli prisons.

Among them were several hundred who were not permitted to return to Gaza or the West Bank because of their involvement in attacks against Israelis.

Some of these militants have instead been relocated to third countries. Malaysia is among them: 15 former prisoners have reportedly been resettled there.

Little is publicly known about these individuals beyond their alleged links to Hamas and past involvement in terrorist plots. According to reports, one was part of a Hamas cell responsible for a suicide bombing in Jerusalem in 2003, while another had been convicted of planning a suicide bombing in Dimona in 2008.

While the Malaysian government has said their activities will be subject to “strict security measures”, it remains unclear whether these individuals have undergone rehabilitation or renounced violent ideologies.

There is also the possibility that additional former prisoners could eventually be relocated to Malaysia or other countries in the region. Indonesia has reportedly offered asylum to an unspecified number of Palestinian prisoners and refugees.

These developments raise an important question: Could the relocation of Hamas-linked militants pose a fresh security risk to Southeast Asia?

Hamas Networks in Southeast Asia

Hamas’ presence in Southeast Asia is not new. The group’s fund raising, recruitment and training activities have been reported in Malaysia for years.

Media reports have alleged that Hamas has conducted cyber research and development activities in Malaysia for more than a decade, sometimes using covert operatives posing as university lecturers to recruit students for cyberwarfare training.

One of these operatives, Fadi Mohammad al-Batsh, was reportedly linked to Hamas’ military wing and involved in developing rockets and drones. In 2014, a captured Hamas commander also admitted that he had been among 10 fighters trained in Malaysia in the use of motorised hang-gliders – a tactic later used during the Oct 7 attacks on Israel.

The Palestinian Cultural Organisation Malaysia, which reportedly functions as Hamas’ unofficial representative office in the country, has also engaged in public outreach and fund raising. It maintains links with Malaysia-based charities that channel donations to support humanitarian activities in Hamas-administered Gaza.

Malaysia has also provided educational opportunities and medical treatment for Palestinians as part of broader humanitarian support since 2023.

It is worth noting that Hamas itself has recruited many young Palestinians and sent them for training abroad – some of whom have stayed in Malaysia while others returned to Gaza and the West Bank where they engage in cyber-related activities.

While such initiatives are primarily humanitarian, they also create environments in which militant networks could potentially reinforce support for Hamas’ campaign of violence in the Middle East if oversight is weak.

Hamas’ New focus: Europe

Developments in Europe provide a warning of how Hamas’ operational footprint may be expanding beyond the Middle East. Following Israel’s military response to the Oct 7 attacks, Hamas’ capabilities in Gaza have been significantly weakened.

Analysts believe the group may therefore be seeking to broaden its overseas activities, targeting Israeli and Jewish interests beyond the Middle East.

In 2025, several alleged Hamas-linked plots were disrupted across Europe. In February 2025, four men suspected of belonging to a covert Hamas cell were charged in Germany with plotting attacks and establishing weapons depots under instructions from the group's armed wing, the Al-Qassam Brigades.

In May 2025, the Danish authorities detained an individual suspected of purchasing drones intended for a Hamas-linked attack in Denmark or elsewhere in Europe.

In October 2025, the German authorities arrested three Palestinians in Berlin suspected of planning attacks on Israeli and Jewish institutions across Europe.

And in November 2025, Austria's domestic intelligence service uncovered a Hamas weapons cache in Vienna. Investigators also reported that criminal networks were used to smuggle weapons, possibly to give Hamas a degree of plausible deniability.

European investigations have further suggested that Hamas had established weapons caches in at least five countries as early as 2019.

Israel's foreign intelligence agency, Mossad, said in a statement on Nov 19, 2025, that these plots were planned in Qatar and possibly Turkey. Hamas later dismissed the allegation as "baseless" and an attempt to damage its reputation.

Yet, taken together, these cases suggest the group has been willing to operate far beyond its traditional battlegrounds and to use the countries that accept them as staging grounds for further acts of terror in those regions.

Why Southeast Asia Cannot Ignore these Risks

Some observers argue that Hamas has little incentive to conduct attacks in Southeast Asia, given the region's generally sympathetic public attitudes towards the Palestinian cause. However, past incidents suggest the risk cannot be dismissed.

In February 2022, it was reported that a Hamas member had met a Filipino in Malaysia between 2016 and 2018 to discuss recruiting local militant groups to attack Jewish targets in the Philippines.

Such cases indicate that Southeast Asia can serve as a platform for networking, recruitment or logistical support – even if attacks are ultimately carried out elsewhere.

The physical presence of individuals linked to militant groups could also aggravate online radicalisation, which has already emerged as a growing security challenge in Southeast Asia.

In Singapore, the authorities reported in July 2024 that a 14-year-old boy had been radicalised online by pro-Hamas content. He had planned to travel to Afghanistan to join a militant group and had even considered carrying out attacks locally.

The teenager had also created an online chat group to recruit others. The case illustrates how quickly extremist narratives circulating online can influence vulnerable individuals.

In such an environment, the presence of individuals with militant credentials could potentially amplify extremist propaganda or inspire sympathisers.

Balancing Humanitarian Support and Security

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has generated strong public pressure in Muslim-majority countries to help alleviate the plight of the Palestinians. However, providing sanctuary to individuals linked to militant groups carries national and regional security risks.

These risks could increase amid the wider confrontation between Iran, Israel and the United States, given Hamas' historical ties with Tehran.

While Hamas operates independently, analysts have long noted that it has received support from Iran and could potentially be used as a proxy in broader regional conflicts. In such a scenario, Palestinian networks abroad – including released Hamas prisoners – could potentially be exploited to support or carry out attacks on US or Israeli targets, both globally and in the region.

The disrupted Hamas plots in Europe highlight the group's refusal to disarm and its willingness to operate far beyond its traditional arenas. The relocation of militants to third countries, combined with global militant networks and online radicalisation, means that security threats rarely remain confined to one region.

Southeast Asia therefore cannot assume it is insulated from such dynamics. While humanitarian assistance to Palestinians remains important, governments in the region must also ensure that robust monitoring and counter-radicalisation measures are in place. Vigilance – rather than complacency – will be essential in preventing militant networks from taking root.

Ghada Soliman is a Research Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. Her research focuses on extremism in the Middle East and North Africa region. This commentary was originally published by The Straits Times on 14 March 2026. Any republication would require the permission of RSIS and The Straits Times.

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