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**HAMAS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE TRIGGERS OF OCTOBER 7**

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Abstract

The outburst of the war in Gaza triggered by Hamas' attacks on October 7th, 2023, has increased the media attention on the militant group. Nevertheless, approaches to Hamas' actions remain simplistic and dismissing the roots of the conflict. Hamas, as both a resistance movement and a political party at power, encompasses an internal paradox revolving around its dual dimension. Building upon existing literature on the militant group, armed groups and political violence, moderation and institutionalisation, and modern political Islam, this paper aims to provide a deeper analysis of the internal dimensions of the movement. Moreover, the sociology of power provides the framework to analyse the differential accumulation of resources within its internal structure in order to understand what triggered such disruption of the until-then followed moderation trend. Since becoming part of Palestinian political elites, the movement has expanded through two dimensions: a political and a resistance one. Accordingly, this approach aims to provide an explanation of how the internal paradox that Hamas faces, given its dual dimension (rooted in different goals), comes to light when power is threatened. The hierarchy of priorities intra-movement, therefore, is reflected in the decision to deploy that operation against Israel.

Key words: Hamas, power, moderation, Political Islam, resistance, elites, legitimacy

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1. Introduction

The longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict has re-escalated in the international agenda with an increasing media attention after the October 7th attacks. In light of this, opinions over Hamas have grown from terrorism accusations to support towards the group and the Palestinian struggle for liberation. In addition to being the recipient of this mass international attention, Hamas (acronym for Islamic Liberation Movement) is nowadays' most powerful actor representing Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Reflecting its origins through its name, the movement is rooted in political Islam and resistance against an occupation power, having emerged as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestinian territories.

Being founded in 1987 in light of the First Intifada as an uprising against Israeli occupation, Hamas emerges to defy the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) hegemonic power, taking advantage of its decreasing popularity. Considered as the saviours for Palestinians, brought legitimacy in those eyes in the occupied territories (Kepel, 2000) under a general sense of dissatisfaction for the inability of the Oslo Accords in 1993 to accomplish peace or statehood despite achieving the creation of the Palestinian Authority. However, a Palestinian Authority increased the importance of elite competition in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Defying the PLO's hegemony was, therefore, the trigger for falling into the never-ending cycle of pursuing power through resource accumulation, effectively achieved with its ascendance to power in the Gaza Strip after winning the 2006 elections (Izquierdo, 2009). Accessing political power through democratic means disrupted the image the world had constructed of the Palestinian militant group.

Since the beginning, Hamas has expressed its clear intentions: the recognition of a Palestinian autonomous and sovereign state (Izquierdo, 2009). The creation of two states in the territory has been on the discussion table for several decades and would conclude in the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel. Acknowledged by many scholars (Bao, 2018; Falah, 2021; ShemerKunz, 2023; Nimni, 2019), this solution reflects neocolonialism and orientalism (Said, 1955a; Pappé, 2013; Falah, 2021), where Palestinian rights would be nowhere to be found (Chester in Kalyvas et al., 2008).

Nevertheless, any desire for Palestinian statehood has been dismissed given the resurfaced active violent conflict, which escalated after October 7. Considering this, the paper focuses on the reasoning behind Hamas' political strategy and objectives: the fight against occupation and the political control of the state, navigating over the tension between competing factors.

The motivation is to deepen in Hamas' duality in its internal strategies and actions to understand the triggers for the October 7th, 2023, attacks. Al-Qassam Brigades' (Hamas' military wing) Operation Al-Aqsa Flood launched on October 7 under the direction of Hamas was justified by the group as a step to get rid of Israeli occupation, reclaim Palestinian rights and liberate its people (Hamas, 2023) –fitting with the dual foundation as a political and resistance actor. Nevertheless, it disrupted the moderation trend observed in political Islam towards less-violent and less-religious strategies (Burgat, 2018; Izquierdo, 2011 & 2013; Kear, 2021), bringing attention to a broader understanding of the movement's aspirations.

In this regard, the paper develops around the premise that Hamas' ascension to power involves a paradox among its accumulation of resources, exhibited in tensions within the movement's priorities which burst in the October 7th attacks. To conduct the research, the main theory used is the sociology of power, based on the circular relationships and increasing relative power through the accumulation of resources: state control, military coercion, ideology, population, and capital.

As a resistance movement fighting for the liberation of Palestinian lands and the freedoms of its people through a strategic use of violence, it becomes confronted with the pursuit of power. Therefore, the fight against occupation enters into conflict with the interests associated with political control –summarised in retaining power over the population through governmental apparatus–, altogether while pursuing greater legitimacy in both political and resistance spheres. As a result, the Palestinian population ends up in a political landscape where the lines are blurred between being an actor and being a resource of power used by Hamas.

The paper is structured as follows. First, it presents a literature review and the theoretical and analytical framework for the analysis. Second, the methodology and research question aimed to answer, followed by the main hypothesis and the

plausibility of answering it. Third, the body of the paper relays on the analysis of Hamas' accumulation of resources. Fourth, the findings of the analysis; finally followed by the conclusions.

2. Theoretical and analytical framework

This section provides a literature review on armed groups and political violence, armed struggle and moderation after institutionalisation, and modern political Islam. Furthermore, it presents the theory on the sociology of power, used as the basis for the analysis.

2.1 Hamas, armed groups and political violence

Hamas defines itself in the newest Document of General Principles and Policies (2017) as a '*national liberation and resistance movement with the goal to liberate Palestine and confront the Zionist project*'. In a context of struggling and resisting against the occupation of a colonial power ¹, Hamas' actions are prone to the use of armed violence and coercion. Besides, literature allows defining Hamas as a Palestinian militant armed group and resistance movement. Likewise, it combines both political and resistance means in the pursuit of its goals, heavily discussed and framed as a 'liberation movement' (Baconi, 2018; Hroub, 2010; Pappé, 2017; and in Chomsky & Pappé, 2015; Said, 1995b) or as a 'terrorist organisation' (Herf, 2024; Reis & Wald, 2024). Hamas emerged as a revolutionary movement from popular discontent, with a clear objective of fighting for Palestinian self-determination against Israel's occupation and never-ending ethnic cleansing, allowing it to define itself as a "political, cultural and social grassroots organisation with a separate military wing specialising in armed resistance against Israeli occupation" (Hroub, 2010:17).

¹ Israel's colonialism fits into the category of 'settler colonialism', meaning its political strategy is to replace the indigenous population of the territory with nationals of the colonial state. In this context, it has led to discrimination and exclusion of Palestinians, which have led Israel to be accused of being an apartheid regime and genocidal state.

Focusing on previous analysis on **armed groups**, Krause & Milliken (2009) consider as essential an ethnographic fieldwork and process reconstruction with a sociological framework to analyse these groups, in addition to a historical perspective on the state's relationship with armed groups. Their definitions state the following (Krause & Milliken, 2009):

Insurgent groups, focused on defeating the regime they are fighting against.

Militant groups, focusing on perceived political and economic injustices using violence.

Warlords, Urban Gangs and Criminal Networks; focused on the pursuit of illicit profits.

Private Militias, Police Forces and Security Companies; as actors pursuing security through the private sector.

Transnational groups, pursuing religious or ideological goals through international interconnected networks while intentionally terror-provoking.

Hamas fits in their category of *armed militant group*, defined in depth as

“Groups that are seeking to redress perceived political and economic injustices through violent means. (...) The level of killing in which they are involved does not exceed (or has not yet exceeded) the violence threshold by which insurgencies are usually demarcated” (Krause & Milliken, 2009).

Regarding **political violence**, Kalyvas (2019) categorises the perpetrators and targets as state and non-state actors. The duality in the foundations of the movement allows categorising it in: state targeting non-state actors (state repression, genocide and ethnic cleansing), and non-state actors targeting a state (organised crime or cartels, mass protest or rebellion, military coup, political assassination, and civil war and terrorism). This paper will employ the concepts of

State Repression, as the violence perpetuated by states on their own population. Is used against mass contestation or, in episodes of political instability, as a tool of ‘coercive responsiveness’.

Terrorism, as the violence perpetuated by a non-state actor with means to intimidate a larger audience than the immediately affected victims. It differs from the category of a terrorist group, which targets a broader audience through transnational action.

Despite using terrorism as a coercive tool, categorising it as a terrorist organisation does not account for a context of fighting an occupation which endorses political violence as well, hence a landscape of a political battle for legitimisation where both sides employ violence. Nevertheless, the absence of an established definition of terrorism in international law ² and the problems of conceptualising it (Kalyvas, 2018; Ramsay, 2015; Bures, 2016; Wight, 2009; Richards & Bryan in Pisou & Jackson, 2018), provide an ambiguous scenario allowing for the politicisation of the Palestinian resistance as both terrorist and antisemitic. This consideration is unfitting to the context and will not be used in this paper.

2.2 Armed struggle and institutionalisation

The armed struggle launched in 1965 has become a symbol of Palestinian autonomous will, waking up the revolutionary sentiment of the population (Sayigh, 1997). The existence of political parties with an armed history is a common phenomenon (Sindre & Söderström, 2016), therefore, analysis on the pursuit of state power through armed resistance shows that the transformation into a political party might imply internal splits, evolving towards complex organisational structures unable to maintain a unified resistance, such as what experienced East Timor (Sindre, 2016).

Gaining independence from colonial powers, the armed pathway in the pursuit of power has had a salient role in Arab states. Lebanon shows the role of militias (as Hezbollah) and the importance of armed forces in the eyes of the population:

² The most widespread is the US' State Department (2001), where terrorism is defined "to be an activity that (1) involves a violent act or an act dangerous to human life, property, or infrastructure; and (2) appears to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, kidnapping, or hostage-taking". Not referencing the state as an actor who employs terrorism is what makes the definition unfitting to the context, as Israel uses terrorism as a tool of coercion in its ethnic cleansing ambitions.

gaining legitimacy, which paves the way to future institutionalisation. Aligned with historical legitimacy, this was prolonged towards political and economic development, where new political elites filled the void in the absence of colonial powers (Izquierdo & Kenow in Izquierdo (ed.), 2009).

Moreover, according to Tilly (1985), “war makes states” (p. 170). This approach argues that violence is intrinsic in the pursuit of state power, where, to reach state status, actors must engage in a path of war-making (to gain control), create state-like institutions (to govern by neutralising their rivals), monopolise violence (against enemies) and extract resources to carry out the first three activities.

2.3 Modern political Islam: towards moderation and nuanced discourses

The ideology of the group shows an evolution towards a moderation of its political stance, analysed under *wasatiyyah*³ and modern Islam by Kear (2021) and Izquierdo (2011). A general pattern of moderation of Islamist movements adopting less radical and more pragmatic positions characterises current relations in the pursuit of power (Izquierdo & Etherington in Izquierdo et al., 2017: 18), in addition to Hamas’ shift towards a nationalistic dimension (Navarro in Izquierdo et al., 2017: 119)—setting aside the creation of an Islamic state ruled under the *sharia*⁴. Furthermore, ideological moderation might be an outcome of a strategic calculation, where “opposition actors moderate their agendas not only to seize new political opportunities but also to evade new political constraints” (Wickham, 2004: 213).

Gaining political control, it has been analysed Hamas’ dual challenges to maintain resistance activities while fulfilling governmental duties (Abu Amr, 2024). Further research has also focused on the consequences derived from PLO’s formal recognition of Israel as a sovereign state in the Oslo Accords in 1993, as it supposed the loss of its stronger negotiation card, which entails losing its credibility and political legitimacy with Palestinian public opinion (Mousavi, 2019; Navarro in

³ Arabic for *moderation* in the context of Islam

⁴ Islamic law

Izquierdo et al., 2017). Such an error, therefore, could not be repeated by Hamas, which has capitalized this failure for its own political strength.

Overall, the literature provides a useful framework for a basis to build more knowledge, focusing on the internal hierarchical structure for shifting strategies by the organisation and its pursuit of power through the accumulation of resources. With it, this paper aims to provide more than a simplistic approach to the actions committed on October 7, accounting for the historical conditions that triggered Hamas' armed resistance from its establishment to the date of the events.

2.4 Sociology of power

The sociology of power theory provides a framework for analysing the resources and alignment with the regime in conditioning Hamas' escalation to political power. This theory has been previously used to analyse political Islam and actors in the Middle East, and despite having been applied to Hamas on counted occasions (Martínez Más, S. & Travínin, J. in Izquierdo (ed), 2009; Navarro in Izquierdo et al., 2017), a systematic analysis on groups is yet to be done. Finding a gap, the competition for power and relation to other political forces in Palestinian politics are analysed as a trigger for the unexpected rise of political violence—hence, October 7—, expressed within the hierarchical organization of the group's objectives.

Izquierdo (2013) defines the sociology of power as the analysis of the relations between social movements, political and religious groups, and regimes. These relations can be lineal, when social mobilisation organises to achieve a certain goal; or circular, when actors act in the pursuit of power and therefore enter the elites' circle. Considering this, there is a relative competition among the actors, falling into a circular and accumulative never-ending cycle—"meaning actors are always in competition to achieve more gains than others" (Izquierdo & Etherington, 2017:17). To do so, elites take on resources in their pursuit of power, such as **state control, coercion, ideology, capital, media and information, and population**. In power relations, it is distinguished to be population, configuring lineal relations; from elites, with circular relations.

For the purpose of this paper, the resources analysed include state control, coercion, ideology, population, and capital; defined by Izquierdo & Etherington (2017) as follows:

State control as a resource and structure of domination, linked to the political control over a territory and its population.

Military coercion as a mean to achieve territorial control rather than a resource of power. Therefore, a tool for legitimising the accumulation of power instead of an instrument which produces it. It is closely linked to territorial and ideological control.

Ideology, used in the process of a differential accumulation of power. Defined as a “system of beliefs accepted as the truth without contestation” (p. 205), is closely linked to identity and as a tool for manipulating.

Population, although it can be an actor itself, can also be used by the elites as a resource under scenarios of ideological and political control.

Capital as a resource for cumulative and comparative competition. Therefore, not money-orientated, but comparative gains.

3. Methodological framework

Mainly based on reviewed literature, this paper aims to provide an analysis focused on internal dynamics on the accumulation of power, using the theories on armed groups and applying the sociology of power. Therefore, the documentation used is mainly secondary, as academic papers and books, with some primary sources, as Hamas’ official documents and reports on the Gaza Strip ⁵ (economic situation, news, polls and surveys). Nevertheless, it is to be noted that some limitations appeared during the elaboration of this paper, as Hamas’ official website was blocked by the government, as it is denoted as a terrorist group by the European Union.

⁵ Accounting for the validity of the sources given contextual limitations.

The used sources include armed groups (and their pursuit of statehood), moderation of armed groups when accessing politics, political Islam and its modernisation, and finally, research focused on Hamas and its actions both as a political and as a military entity. Primacy was given to more recent papers, as the information provided is more fitting with the objectives of the paper. Linking this literature with an approach based on sociology of power, it is aimed to investigate deeper the pursuit of power of the movement through its resources.

The timeframe of the analysis remains from 2017 until 2023 –before October 7, considering as important turning points the moderation by publishing the New Document of General Policies and its disruption by the October 7th attacks.

Therefore, the research question of this paper is: **Why did Hamas disrupt the moderation trend observed in modern forms of political Islam as exhibited in the events of October 7?**

With its dual structure as both a political and resistance actor, it could seem that October 7 reflects the prioritisation of resistance goals rather than governmental aims. This deviation from the moderation trend observed in modern political Islam, is it really a hierarchy of its resistance features? Or does the disruption of this trend disguise a prevalence of the state power ambitions?

With ‘moderation trend’, this paper identifies the one observed in modern forms of political Islam, rooted in both the de-Islamisation of the political objectives and the gradual abandonment of the use of political violence and armed force. Consequently, discourses are more pragmatic with a nuanced ambiguity.

The hypothesis is that Hamas undergoes an internal battle –reflected in the accumulation of resources– between the political and the military wing, with hierarchy of the former. Moreover, the military wing is instrumentalized to perform resistance against the occupation in the pursuit of greater power in the political sphere. The attacks conducted on October 7 are, therefore, a culmination of this paradox where, due to threats against the survival of the government, a discourse about resistance accompanied with a military operation gave back the people’s trust and legitimacy to the governmental apparatus. As for the disruption of the Islamic

moderation, it is assumed that the pattern ended where power was threatened, and Hamas responded by adopting a more nationalistic dynamic in its political stance. Therefore, overarching the political goals over the resistance's indicates a primacy in the pursuit of state control.

4. Analysis of the resources

Taking part in the elections was a defining moment that paved the way for subsequent transformations of the group (Sayigh, 2011), but not without conflict. Internal dissensus appeared among the most conservative views, committed to an armed fight, and the most modern and moderate approaches willing to be involved in politics. After entering institutional politics, an adaptation to the changes in the surrounding political environment was needed, resulting in moderating (Kear, 2021). Nevertheless, this trend seemingly might have come to an end with the outburst of the war in Gaza.

Understanding October 7, "Israel and regional states seemed to have mistaken Hamas's pragmatic defensive position over the years for its subjugation within mainstream politics" (Hamoud, 2024) given its nature as a resistance movement. To explore the causes and triggers, this section analyses the internal dynamics through the accumulation of resources, differentiating the political wing from the military in representation of the internal dilemma: armed struggle versus diplomatic-pragmatic approach (Klein, 2007).

4.1 State control

After winning the 2006 legislative elections, Hamas became a relevant actor involved in the institutional dimension of politics. Since its establishment, has faced several challenges threatening its position in power (such as the blockade imposed by Israel since 2007, followed by the misalignment with Fatah—resulting in overtaking the control over the Gaza Strip—, resisting the military operations launched by Israel throughout the years, and recently the war since October 2023). In addition, due to the militant character, the government has seen its relations with

Western states severely affected. Restricted foreign alliances and lack of international recognition because of terrorism accusations, apart from limiting access to resources and foreign aid, come as a pressure to exit power. Nevertheless, the military faction helps to attract attention and alliance with regional actors.

Focusing on internal dynamics, despite having a diverse membership, most former leaders were drawn from lower-middle classes, coming from rural areas and refugee camps (Hroub in Hroub (ed.), 2010); hence, there is an important factor of struggle for liberation and resistance traits. Nevertheless, the leader of Hamas holds the control over both wings: political and the Brigades, reflecting how tension over the internal factions is subjugated to the political dimension, which is the one providing a higher power.

Furthermore, Palestinian domestic politics have shifted towards competition and confrontation between the two main political parties: Hamas, controlling the Gaza Strip, and Fatah, in the West Bank. The competition represents a fragmentation of the territory and Palestinians' views on politics, threatening the preservation of power by questioning Hamas' government efficiency in comparison to the situation in the West Bank. A factor differentiating both territories is the institutional presence of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the latter, a *de facto* independent government where Hamas controls the political administration of the territory after seizing PA's power from the Strip through arms in 2007 (Alvárez-Ossorio & Abu-Tarbush, 2024).

Considering state control, this dimension generates tension amongst internal criticism and dissensus given the shift from a resistance movement to a quasi-state (Sayigh, 2011), apart from problematics derived from consequential actions: increasing militancy involves destruction of infrastructure, under state functions. Among those, the government has a duty to fulfil the provision of public goods and safeguard the well-being of its citizens. Since the 2007 siege, the Gaza Strip has undergone a deep crisis involving energy, economy and resources. Hamas has had to face a situation of deep financial and economic crisis for more than a decade, destabilising governmental structures due to popular discontent.

According to World Bank Data, in 2023 the GDP per capita in Gaza was US \$1,087, a fifth of the value in the West Bank. These disparities have been a longstanding concern, also reflected in half of Gazans living under the upper-middle income poverty line (World Bank Data, 2023). A report by Arab Barometer shows that in 2023, more than 40% of the Gazans answered the economic situation as the most important challenge in their country. In addition, over 50% of the interviewees showed dissatisfaction over the healthcare system and the quality of the streets. Nevertheless, more than 60% proved as good the government's performance in providing security and order (Shikaki, 2023).

Overall, Hamas' government in the Gaza Strip shows clear deficiencies in providing strong infrastructures, public services and a stable economy, counterbalanced by the security sector. Prioritising security does not appear as unfitting to life under occupation and over a decade of economic and resource blockade. However, a government needs economic stability to maintain the political one, as the bearers of responsibility before public services and state infrastructures; not being able to control the causes driving to high rates of poverty and unemployment, the government is condemned to a downfall of popular support. The internal paradox is then represented in the oversight of the government by the political dimension.

4.2 Coercion and military power

The definition of a militant armed group encompasses the involvement of military power; hence, Hamas was (and still is) based on coercion tools. In addition, by controlling the Gaza Strip, directly enjoys the monopoly of violence and control over the security sector. The representation of the duality of the movement remains in the use of force by a resistance movement or sustaining internal security under the responsibility of the government (including repression to the opposition).

Under the resistance dimension, the military wing of the movement is formed by the Izz al-Dim al-Qassam Brigades. Having its own leadership and recruiting mechanism (Hroub, 2010), upholds the command of the military force, equipment and recruitment, with alliances to other armed groups and neighbouring states –as Hezbollah and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Overall, shows a meaningful planning

capability in the security sector provided by experience reflected in the quality of training and recruitment, providing legitimacy (Sayigh, 2011a). The *modus operandi* includes the use of terror, which, according to Kalyvas (2019), an opposition terrorist campaign is often a response of state terror (here perpetuated by Israel), launched by a non-state actor (the Brigades). In addition, despite enjoying autonomy over the military dimension, as a wing of Hamas, the Brigades can be used as state machinery.

By focusing on the governmental apparatus, coercion has been instrumentalized by dominant elites to maintain both power structures and accumulation of power (Izquierdo, Feliu, Camps; 2021). Hamas is no different; holding the monopoly of the security sector has repressed peaceful protesters, activists and human rights workers opposed to the government (Amnesty International, 2019). Therefore, the institutionalisation of Hamas' power did not mean to set aside the use of violence. As a militant armed group, its goals imply the use of violent action to fight against the injustice that is almost a century of occupation (Krause & Milliken, 2009)—but as a political actor in power, uses violence to undermine threats to its position, hence coercive responsiveness (Kalyvas, 2019).

Through both dimensions, the movement has exercised the use of violence, resulting in violations of international law and international humanitarian law, considered a war crime and a crime against humanity (Alvárez-Ossorio & Abu-Tarbush, 2024). No struggle for liberation justifies these violations: even in war, the adherence to international law remains mandatory. Especially after October 7, the volume of military strikes using terror as a tool (although never comparable to the disproportionate and civilian-targeted missions by Israel) has led to even more accusations of being a terrorist organisation, tarnishing the reputation and legitimacy as both a democratically elected power and a resistance movement.

4.3 Ideology

In the Document of General Principles and Policies (2017), Hamas expresses a shifting positioning in the Islamic discourse in comparison to the foundational Charter. More focused on a nationalistic dimension, pursues statehood adhering to

the 1967 borders –a *de facto* recognition of Israel. The moderation and pragmatism that have been characterising the political declarations of the movement in the years afterwards the Document (deviating from the pursuit of an Islamic state), align with what scholars (Kear, 2021; Izquierdo, 2011) have identified as modern political Islam. Considering this, the moderation in the Islamic discourse and pragmatism employed by the movement seems to show compliance within the political elites to maintain its position in power and avoid disappearing as an actor. The transparency the organisation aims to transmit to the Gazan population is indeed a strategy rooted in its political discourse. Ideology is then perfectly shaped towards acceptance and political support, aiming to become the face of fighting for liberation.

Through the military wing, ideology remains in the pursuit of the liberation of Historic Palestine through resistance and Islamic values, overall countering the political and religious moderation. The Al-Qassam Brigades (2025) define themselves as the jihadi military wing of a “movement with a national liberation project”. Differing from the 2017 Hamas Charter, the Brigades advocate for the pursuit of a Palestinian state as “one indivisible body”. As for their actions, justify that their enemy “understands only the language of force and is deterred only by resistance”, projecting, as a militant group, the unwillingness to negotiate with an occupation force based on violent action. Lastly, they clarify their participation inside Hamas’ decision-making and guidance but differ in the political leadership in the practical aspects of military action (Al-Qassam Brigades, 2025).

As ideology easily spreads abroad (Álvarez-Ossorio & Abu-Tarbush, 2024), the weight of Palestinians living in the diaspora becomes a salient political weapon. Therefore, it is important not to undermine the weight of ideology because of analysing an armed group. The Hamas movement strengthens in the decentralisation of its internal organisation, giving importance to the voices of members from abroad, across Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the Arab Gulf, Europe and Western countries. The spread of ideology among the population across the region is key for pursuing a wave of solidarity with the Palestinian struggle.

Moreover, several personalities had impacted the evolution of the movement. Yahya Sinwar, former leader of Hamas and the Brigades since 2017, guided the path

towards a moderation and gradual abandonment of armed resistance, represented in the separation with Muslim Brotherhood in 2017 (Abu Amr, 2024). Nevertheless, an internal governance model with a flexible leadership structure allows Hamas to fulfil pragmatic adaptability to changing political dynamics—avoiding reliance on strong personalities. Moreover, the duality of governing authority and resistance movement makes of Hamas a unique actor, aiming for acceptance within mainstream politics while subverting it (Hamoud, 2024).

Given the scenario of decades of struggling against colonial occupation, being competent to confront the Israeli state while pursuing the liberation of Historical Palestine brings legitimacy.

4.4 Population

By ascending into political control of the Gaza Strip, the group becomes a new actor among the political elite. Controlling the government means to retain control over the population, hence used as a resource in the pursuit of power. Not being an actor anymore, Palestinians are under the control and coercion of an elite's power, subordinated to their own interests.

Built upon the military wing of Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, Hamas has engaged in religious and social activism since its early days (Hroub in Hroub (ed.), 2010). The institutional infrastructure is composed by the Shura Council (a consultative body) and a Political Bureau (the decision-making body) (European Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.), besides a strong network of charitable, social and welfare associations. The promotion of Islamic values (*da'wa*) to the society is therefore backed by a strong social-civilian apparatus, through participation in charities and activities besides religious, educational and social institutions established throughout the territory (Pascovich, 2012).

Additionally, a study conducted between September 28 and October 8, 2023⁶ by Arab Barometer in partnership with the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey

⁶ Although the study ended in the Gaza Strip prior to the war, the validity of it remains uncertain given this exceptional context.

Research, shows very little trust in Hamas by most Gazans. The findings reveal frustration over the group's ineffective governance and dealignment with its ideology. The vast majority expressed frustration regarding ineffective governance in facing the extreme economic hardship. Moreover, most interviewees disagreed with the political position of eliminating the state of Israel, the main objective underlying the Brigades' actions (Jamal & Robbins, 2023).

Between July and August 2023, several newspapers (AP, The New York Times, Al-Monitor; 2023) reported that the streets of Gaza were the scenario of multitudinous rallies against the Hamas government for its bad governance in addressing the poor economic situation and electricity outages. The governmental security forces repressed the demonstrations, including several arrests.

An increasing dealignment and distrust from the population imply a threat for Hamas. It becomes evident the need to make use of this population in the pursuit of power. Because of this, engaging in a war against Israel can overturn the dissatisfaction into greater support. As prior research by Arab Barometer shows, in periods when Israel conducts targeted attacks on Gaza, Hamas' 'radical' ideology is more appealing to Gazans (Jamal & Robbins, 2023). Hence, Israeli brutality increases the movement's popularity and legitimacy (Hroub, 2010).

In conclusion, the population shows increasing and salient dissatisfaction with Hamas' government. This opens the question over the legitimacy of October 7: was it an act of resistance or an attempt to cover up prior irresponsiveness to people's demands and bad democratic practices?

4.5 Capital

Capital becomes a basic resource to sustain both resistance and political movements' aspirations of increasing their power. It takes form in the size of the governmental apparatus, external alliances and international aid.

The unavailability of data does not allow to verify the accusations of clientelism, corruption and lack of political integrity among government leaders. Nonetheless,

a lack of scandals and recognised cases in this matter suggest that such accusations are not substantiated with reliable sources.

Among available data, Hamas has shown resourcing to strategic dialogue and relations with regional alliances to achieve financing— Egypt, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye (Abu Amr, 2024; Hamoud, 2024). International aid aimed to reconstruct the territory and for humanitarian reasons, on the other hand, has come from other actors, as the European Union and the United Nations through the UNRWA mission, but because of perceptions over Hamas, has decreased. Consequently, Hamas fears bear on international pressures in the form of restricted cash flows into Gaza, worsening humanitarian conditions for Gazans and threatening the legitimacy of the movement's governmental administration (Abu Amer, 2021).

Originally, international aid was meant to go through the Palestinian Authority. Despite not having any power in the Strip after the 2007 war, the PA remains the granted authority to administer income inflows (Abu Amer, 2021). Nevertheless, its decreasing power is represented in the bypassing of their authority by allocating other oversight actors: Israel and the UN. Consequently, competition within Palestinian elites increases.

In 2018 it was made public a Qatari payout of 90 million into Gaza to be transferred in a six-month period. The Qatari grant targeted underprivileged families, aiming to rebuild Gaza in the aftermath of violent conflict (Al-Mughrabi, 2018). The trigger was Mahmoud Abbas' (PA's President) budget cuts towards government employees from the Gaza Strip, causing thousands of layoffs (Al-Mughrabi, 2018). Considering this, elite competition is exemplified, rather than internal competition within Hamas' apparatus. However, aid was not directed to Hamas but Gaza, and achieved to bypass the Palestinian Authority by having Israel's agreement to build a mediation system to provide cash grants with monthly allocations. Moreover, in 2021, Qatar also provided a financial grant of \$360 million to Gazans in the Strip (Elbagir et al., 2023). Once again, aid is directed to the population, but positive consequences bear in Hamas in a diminishing dissatisfied population.

Qatar, seemingly being an ally for the movement's administration, has protagonised the latest scandal —*Qatargate*—, where has shown pragmatism in the political strategy. Apparently, close persons to Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, were taking money from Qatar. Nevertheless, the loser in this scandal is Netanyahu's government, as in the eyes of Israelis, Qatar is seen as the major patron of Hamas (McKernan, 2025). Additionally, Israel was knowledgeable of financial aid accessing the Strip and took advantage of the situation by allowing its entrance to increase the political competition between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, as it would prevent the needed stability for establishing a Palestinian sovereign state (Al-Mughrabi, 2018).

Capital accumulation, therefore, is addressed in a relational power to other Palestinian factions, as the Palestinian Authority, Fatah (political competence) and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (resistance competence). By gathering the abovementioned resources, the capital of the movement increases in both dimensions.

5. Findings

Since the beginning, the main goal of the movement has been the liberation of Palestine. Given an increasing accumulation of resources in the path of pursuing an incremental power, in the New Document of Policies (Hamas, 2017) we find a contention and shifting towards moderation and pragmatism as a political strategy—aligned with Izquierdo (2011, 2013), Kepel (2010), Kear (2021). Besides Burgat (2018), defining disruptive moderation as a political and ideological issue rather than religious, hence October 7. Since these attacks, the main strategy has resorted to armed confrontation, involving the use of terror as a tool against the enemy.

Moderation becomes represented in a decreasing Islamic discourse, but not in abandoning political violence. Close to Burgat's (2018) research, Hamas exemplifies the ideological fracture within political Islam by deviating towards a nationalist dimension and employing violence as an expression of undergoing

occupation in a hierarchical international system—which neglects the Global South, hence the Palestinian fight for liberation. With this, Hamas and the Palestinian struggle are driven by the Israeli occupation rather than Islamic roots.

A question remains: why did the attacks happen? The duality of Hamas provides the basis for the response. The analysis has shown a clear hierarchy of the political faction over the resources, especially state control and population⁷. It is to be noted the importance of capital, although it is better addressed in relation to other elites.

As a militant group, pursues political goals through violent means, which explains why it orchestrated an armed operation against Israel. Nevertheless, we found that Hamas is deeply rooted in a duality of politics and resistance since its participation in democratic elections, which broadens the dimensions of the movement.

Dissatisfaction among Gazans towards the governmental response to the economic situation and bad governance was increasingly threatening Hamas' position in power. Polls suggest that, if there were to be elections before October 7, Fatah would have increased support in light of Hamas' declining popularity. As proven before, direct and prolonged confrontation with the occupation power always results in increased support and legitimacy for the party in power; hence, popularity and sustaining state control explain the timing of the operation.

Furthermore, increasing recruitments to the Brigades are a consequence of Israel's never-ending use of violence. In the end, Hamas defines itself as a resistance group against occupation and, despite having consolidated itself as a political elite, has been able to remain viewed as the resistance against hegemonic political powers.

Unwilling to lose power, politics win over resistance. The movement made usage of the military wing to frame the operation as an act against Israel. It is not to undermine colonialism and longstanding oppression, which clearly were a factor triggering armed confrontation, but is the timing of the operation which fits with instability in power.

⁷ See Table I in Annex I, page 29.

6. Conclusions

The October 7 attacks disrupted Hamas' moderation path adopted since entering mainstream politics and enhanced in 2017 with the New Charter. Mainstream politics implied an establishment among the political elites, where the militant group shifted its goals towards a never-ending pursuit of power. Inside the elite's circle, Hamas loses the autonomy retained as a revolutionary group and is obligated by the system to adopt a more pragmatic stance in order to maintain power and its position as a relevant actor.

The dual structure, besides pragmatism and adaptability to changing political dynamics and conditions, also fosters hierarchy within the movement. As stated before, the main hypothesis is confirmed as the internal battle rooted in the differential accumulation of resources shows a hierarchy of the political wing over the military, driving to the disruption of the previously followed moderation. The instability of the Strip's government due to a deep economic crisis and poor governmental responsibility in addressing the citizens' demands for greater conditions threatened the position in power, opening a path for deciding to engage in direct violence against Israel. Aiming to survive as a government, direct confrontation enhanced popularity and legitimacy in the eyes of Gazans, previously deeply dissatisfied with Hamas' governance. Through the instrumentalisation of the armed struggle, the political dimension benefits by winning back the trust needed to maintain its position within the political elites. Therefore, the analysis has shown a primacy of state control and ideology within politics, where apparent moderation in the Islamic discourse hinders power politics and nationalistic dynamics to increase the position within the system, towards the pursuit of state control. Losing state control would imply disappearing as an elite (Izquierdo & Kemou in Izquierdo (ed.), 2009), hence infeasible to even allow the threat to exist.

Moreover, other state actors have underestimated Hamas as a dual political and resistance actor, which allows for the militant group to pursue political goals through an armed path.

In conclusion, despite having encountered limitations in finding truthful data and Hamas' official documentation, this paper has achieved to show a hierarchy of the

pursuit of power when non-state actors enter mainstream politics and their relations within the system become circular, always pursuing a greater (relative) position regarding other actors. With this analysis of Hamas, and accounting for nowadays war in Gaza and colonial occupation in the Palestinian Territories, further research could be focused on the adjustment to a longstanding and direct armed conflict where the group has had to adapt to changing dynamics and conditions threatening its survival—not only as a governmental entity but as an armed militant group.

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8. Annex I.

Table I. Distribution of the resources and challenges intra-group

| Resources | Political dimension | Military dimension | Hierarchy |
|-----------------------------|--|---|---|
| Political and state control | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monopoly of state control without PA Positive performance in providing security and order Restricted foreign alliances Comparison to the West Bank Deficient provision of strong infrastructures Deep economic crisis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legitimacy by non-compliance to mainstream politics Subversion to Hamas' political directives | Political preeminence , as despite facing a legitimacy crisis, the political wing holds the monopoly of state power and control over the military. |
| Coercion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monopoly over the security sector Coercion and repression over opposition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Autonomous recruiting mechanism Alliance with armed groups Legitimacy through resistance Use of terror | Equal weight , as both wings exercise their power at similar levels |
| Ideology | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> De-Islamisation, towards nationalism Moderation and pragmatism Acceptance of 1967 borders Presence in the diaspora Personality leaders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-acceptance of 1967 borders: liberation of Historic Palestine Islamic nationalism | Equal weight ; while pragmatism shows to be less mobilizer, Palestinians tend to accept 1967 borders as an easier path towards peace. |
| Population | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Control over the population Strong social network Popular dissatisfaction and decreasing legitimacy Demonstrations neutralised with repression | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legitimacy by fighting Israel | Political preeminence , given the political wing's overarching control over the population and instrumentalisation of the military, brings legitimacy. |
| Capital | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foreign aid and external alliances | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-state actors and regional alliances* <p>*Scarcity of data in this section.</p> | Better addressed in relation to other Palestinian political elites. |

Legend: Political preeminence-orange, Equal weight-green, Other elites-grey.