**Projective Psychological Warfare (PPW): An Analysis of Hamas Hebrew Videoclips as Part of Its Propaganda Campaign Against Israel Between 2007 and 2012**

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**Abstract**

Hamas invests vast resources in propaganda for a number of diverse audiences, harnessing the communications channels it operates on different media platforms. Over the course of the many years of the Israel-Hamas confrontation, the organization has waged psychological warfare and an ongoing propaganda war against Israeli society, seeking to influence Israelis’ perceptions and feelings. However, there is reason to doubt the effectiveness of this activity. This essay examines Hamas’s psychological warfare activities by analyzing videoclips the organization produced with content in Hebrew, clearly designed for the Israeli audience. Based on an in-depth analysis of the videoclips’ contents, both textual and visual, Hamas’s activity may be defined as Projective Psychological Warfare (PPW), that is, psychological warfare that reflects the beliefs and feelings of the entity operating it rather than targeting its messages to the culture and worldview of its target audience. It is in light of this phenomenon that we seek to explain the inefficacy of Hamas’s psychological warfare against Israel.

**Keywords**

**Introduction**

Our rocket hit the Knesset![[1]](#footnote-1) We shot down an Israeli airplane![[2]](#footnote-2) These proclamations of victory, among others,[[3]](#footnote-3) were part of Hamas’s psychological warfare against Israel during the Pillar of Defense operation Israel launched against Gaza in 2012. The Center for Psychological Warfare (*Malat*) of the Israel Defense Forces’ (IDF)Operations Directorate, founded in 2005, went into action. It released a number of online videos with Arabic subtitles exposing the lies of Ḥamas under the motto: “Ḥamas proclaims – We know the truth”.[[4]](#footnote-4)

A common definition of “Psychological Warfare” –PSYWAR – is: “the use during wartime of non-violent, convincing measures and arguments in order to achieve political, economic, and military goals.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Essentially, PSYWAR is propaganda aimed at misinforming, manipulating public opinion, or inciting violence. It is an age-old and universal practice. The first channels of propaganda distribution were verbal: rumor-mongering, sermonizing, and public speaking. Other means advanced in tandem with the advancement of technology, from newspapers to radio and television, internet, emails, text messages, Facebook, Twitter, and forever-expanding technical means. As is clear, the advent of smart phones has revolutionized the availability of instant information.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Schleifer identifies three distinct target groups for PSYWAR: home, neutral, and enemy.[[7]](#footnote-7) Religious messages through radio and television discussing the importance of jihad (holy war) for the sake of Palestine invoking religious strengthening, patience (*ṣabr*) and perseverance (*ṣumūd*) are intended for home consumption.[[8]](#footnote-8) The Zionist enemy is consistently portrayed in caricatures as the inhumane aggressor and land snatcher, thus inciting and legitimizing the murder of children, even infants. Radical Islamic values are instilled from early childhood, consistently portraying Israel as an illegitimate entity and a legitimate target for terrorism.[[9]](#footnote-9) The same applies to Israel’s adult population, all reinforced by inflammatory sermons in mosques and religious rulings by Islamic leaders. The murder of Israeli citizens is therefore rendered desirable, even honorable. Using such demonization of Israelis, the crushing poverty of the Palestinian population and their suffering due to curfews and air raids are all not only overlooked, but are accepted as necessary for paving the road to achieve all the goals of Ḥamas, based on the principles of the *sabr* and *ṣumūd* of Palestinian society. [[10]](#footnote-10)

The neutral group consists of foreign media channels. Hamas engages a host of employees tasked with documenting in video and stills every minute of conflict or battle between them and the Israelis. Clearly, Hamas attributes a great deal of importance to this activity, referring to its documentation and dissemination as “the camera weapon.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

Foreign journalists have unlimited access, but risk having their written and visual material confiscated if Hamas considers it detrimental to the image the want to convey.[[12]](#footnote-12) Images published by photographers who work for large, respectable channels are captioned with the news network caption, adding much credibility to the pictures.[[13]](#footnote-13) Furthermore, Hamas does not hesitate to stage emotional scenes for the media, such as removing “bodies”[[14]](#footnote-14) or the carrying “dead” or “wounded” children to further its goal of demonizing the enemy.[[15]](#footnote-15)

The third target is the enemy itself, consisting of both the military and the civilian populations. Ḥamas goes to great lengths to broadcast messages aimed at weakening the morale of its enemy.

Hamas used this type of PSYWAR against Israel during Operation Cast Lead (Dec. 27 2008–Jan. 18 2009). The main thrust of its PSYWAR campaign came in wake of the operation’s completion, as during the fighting, most of Hamas’s resources were focused on its military confrontation with Israel. An analysis of the psychological campaign shows that while it was aimed mostly at Western audiences with the goal of influencing international public opinion to exert pressure on Israel, it also targeted Israeli public opinion. Their key message was that Gaza represents a monstrous trap for the IDF and Israeli society and that entering it will lead to mass casualties on the Israeli side and a show of victory for Hamas when the operation ends. Hamas disseminated these messages using the media at its disposal, making sure to plant rumors about Israeli casualties, including one that Gilad Shalit, the soldier then being held captive in the Gaza Strip, had been wounded by an Israeli airstrike during the operation.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Several studies, such as the one described above, have examined the communications campaign Hamas wages against Israel and to influence international public opinion.[[17]](#footnote-17) This study seeks to expand the scope of our understanding of this Hamas effort by analyzing the underlying assumptions that are expressed in the Hebrew-language PSYWAR Hamas wages against the population of Israel, the target of a significant portion of Hamas’s PSYWAR efforts. The core argument of this essay, supported by several videoclips with songs in Hebrew produced by Hamas for the Israeli audience, is that such productions actually express three fundamental beliefs Hamas holds about the conflict with Israel, therefore serving more as self-reinforcement than an effective influence on Israeli public opinion. This essay defines this phenomenon as Projective Psychological Warfare (PPW). The case studies were produced between 2007 and 2012, the first years of Hamas shaping its image as the governing entity of the Gaza Strip, from the time it seized control of the territory in June 2007 until Israel’s Operation Pillar of Fire in November 2012 in response to rocket fire on southern Israel.

***First message: Hamas’s willingness to sacrifice itself***

Hamas issued the videoclip *Ḥamas Is the Apple of My Eyes* in mid-2007, around the time its armed branch violently seized control of the Gaza Strip following the organization’s victory at the polls in January 2006.

This song is written in faulty Hebrew, first broadcast in 2007 by the Voice of Palestine radio station. Originally intended to glorify the organization as part of its war on *Fataḥ*,[[18]](#footnote-18) it was later produced as a videoclip and uploaded for viewing on YouTube.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Below are the lyrics:

*Oh,oh ha ha ha*

*Ḥamas Ḥamas Ḥamas*

*Is the apple of my eyes*

*They ruined the Merkava[[20]](#footnote-20)*

*Ḥamas is the apple of my eyes*

*Every minute, a terrorist attack*

*Soldiers are afraid*

*In black bags there are pieces of Jewish meat*

*Our answer to the assassination of Yassin*

*We want Sharon’s head*

*Ḥamas Ḥamas Ḥamas*

*Is the apple of my eyes.*

This clip lacks verbal complexity, is repetitive, boring, and focuses mainly on creating alarming visual messages of Ḥamas warriors and heroes on the one hand, and injured Israeli soldiers and citizens on the other. Ḥamas, an organization that is weaker than the IDF, prefers messages that emphasize their determination as warriors and their willingness to sacrifice themselves. The message conveyed is that the spirit of battle, not necessarily sophisticated weapons, is what determines victory. This message is bolstered by the success of the suicide bombers who willingly go to their death, armed with nothing more than the belt of explosives and their spirit of battle. This in contrast to the Israeli military, equipped with sophisticated weapons and determination, but nonetheless feeling helpless in their quest to preserve life. The clip therefore exaggerates the number of suicide attacks (“Every minute, a terrorist attack”) and focuses on images of body parts being collected in black plastic bags in order to maximize the impact of a massacre (“In black bags there are pieces of Jewish meat”). Even during the Pillar of Defense operation, Ḥamas posted clips, again in poor Hebrew, in which the principal motif was suicide bombings. “We missed the suicide bombings… wait for us… coming to you soon in bus stations and in coffee shops.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

On the night of June 26 2006, a group of terrorists emerged from a tunnel beneath the Kerem Shalom crossing along the Israel-Gaza border, attacked a *Merkavah* tank on guard duty, killed two soldiers, wounded others, and abducted the soldier Gilad Shalit, who became the subject of considerable attention in Israel and internationally during the course of his imprisonment. Five long years of international negotiations to obtain his release achieve nothing. Only the pressure of the Shalit family, supported by a great majority of the Israeli public to acquiesce to Ḥamas demands, succeeded in essentially forcing then Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to release more than one thousand Palestinian prisoners, most with blood in their hands, in exchange for Gilad Shalit.[[22]](#footnote-22) This episode is memorialized in the words of the clip *Ḥamas Ruined the Merkavah Tank*. For five long years, Ḥamas was well aware that it held Israel’s political stability in their grip. The release of more than a thousand prisoners was seen as the pinnacle of their prowess. For Hamas and its adherents, an entire country imploring for the life of one soldier is seen as a sign of total weakness: “soldiers are afraid,” as sung in the clip. Terrorists and suicide bombers, on the other hand are the real heroes, “the apple of my eyes.” For Ḥamas, the abduction of Israeli soldiers is its most important strategic tool, simply because Jewish society values the sanctity of life above all else.[[23]](#footnote-23)

In 2013, the Ḥamas Ministry of Communication published a 45-minute movie, *al-Wahm al-mutabadid,*[[24]](#footnote-24) meaning, “the illusion has been shattered” – the illusion of Israel’s might. This movie reconstructs the planning, the kidnapping itself, and the great ultimate achievement. Its message is that despite all the advanced technology available to the Zionist soldiers, Ḥamas warriors succeeded in attacking a military post that had been designed to protect them. These kidnappings are legitimized by Ḥamas in the film, portraying abducting Israeli soldiers as the only successful tactic for releasing captive Palestinian prisoners.[[25]](#footnote-25) Beyond that, the abduction avenges the Israeli policy of targeted assassinations of Ḥamas leaders, the most prominent of them being Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, assassinated in 2004.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Another videoclip produced by Ḥamas, *The Fearful Zionist Soldier,*[[27]](#footnote-27) portrays an Israeli soldier who wants to go back to his mother and his dog. He cries and pleads. His eyes continually squint, his knees jerk and shake. He doesn’t want to be a hero, he doesn’t want to die, he doesn’t want to join Gilad Shalit. All he wants is to go home, to join his mother and his dog. All attempts by his commander to inspire him with courage fail. Eventually, the commander decides to take the soldier to the army rabbi, hoping that prayer will help. The rabbi, mumbling in Hebrew and Arabic, prays for God to infuse the young soldier with the spirit of battle, willing to kill children and to kill elderly people on their way to prayer. With every verse that the rabbi speaks, the weak-hearted soldier gathers strength, straightens up, and seems ready to go to battle. Now his commander encourages him, saying that the IDF is the only army that does not fear death, repeating this several times. Just at that moment, an approaching Hamas’s rocket is sighted. All those around the young soldier scatter away in fear, the commander included. Initially, our soldier doesn’t seem to realize what is about to happen. Once he realizes the impending danger, he is gripped by fear, immobilized, and finally goes up in smoke as the rocket explodes. The over-exaggerated acting of the soldier and the characterization of the rabbi are intended to be funny. This videoclip is obviously designed for home consumption. Ḥamas intends to represent the IDF soldier as fearful and fragile – a young man whose fears in the end take precedence over the interests of the nation. The rabbi’s prayers seem to strengthen him, yet when the moment comes, he is paralyzed, helpless.

Thus, the message delivered by *Hamas Is the Apple of My Eyes* echoes Hamas’s perception that it and its men are heroic and willing to fight, whereas the Jews, even the soldiers of the IDF, are cowards who look for salvation instead of fighting on the battlefield and paying the price of war. The fact that the clip was produced in Hebrew shows that the target audience was the Israeli enemy, but because of the way in which it was made – in flawed Hebrew – it fails to realize its goal.

***Second message: The justness of its path in terms of the claim to the land***

*This Land is Our Land*[[28]](#footnote-28) is yet another clip, created in 2009 and posted on YouTube. It expounds the Palestinian and Islamic narrative in a far richer language than the preceding clip, accompanied by more sophisticated visual components than the earlier ones. The text is as follows:

This land is our land

Inherited from our forefathers

Zionists, stay away from us

You will be buried under the sand of our land

Rise as they may, your buildings will fall

However much you continue with your craziness

With our hands we will erase your reality

You will know no love in your settlements

Because of every verse of the Qurʼān, because of every letter

In history and because of every era

We won’t give up our rights at all.

We won’t give up our rights at all.

We have been here since the beginning of time

Even before the world was created

You will be erased by the power of the sword

Our heroes, our believers

Army of rockets

In this land you are foreigners

From our land all of your settlers will be expelled

For we are reaching the day of freedom

You have nothing here but graves

This land is our land.

The song is sung in imperfect Hebrew, the lyrics reading like a bad translation from Arabic, while images of Ḥamas soldiers during training mix with others of refugee camps, battles and explosions. Ḥamas soldiers are portrayed as the victors while the Zionist soldiers lie wounded or dead. This video focuses on the theological struggle between Ḥamas as a religious movement and Zionism as – in their view – an imperialist movement. Ḥamas believes that Palestine, at the center of which lies al-Quds/Jerusalem, has been an inalienable religious endowment of Islam ever since its occupation by the Muslims during the seventh century, not just a piece of land to be relinquished. According to the Islamic narrative, al-Quds/Jerusalem was visited by the Prophet Muhammad during the Night Journey (al-Isrāʼ and al-Miʽrāj) that took him from Mecca to the “farthest mosque” (al-Masjid al-Aqṣā), recognized as the Temple Mount in Jewish tradition.[[29]](#footnote-29) As a result of the Prophet’s journey, Jerusalem became sacred to Islam. According to the Qurʼan, Islam arose in order to replace and substitute the preceding religions (Judaism and Christianity).[[30]](#footnote-30) The sins of the Jews, about which the Qurʼan reports in detail, nullify their status as “the Chosen People,” just as the Christians’ belief in the Holy Trinity deprives them of any rights to superiority. The new true believers are the Muslims, for they have continued along the path of Abraham, the first believer. In this way, Islam is connected to Palestine and the “inheritance of the forefathers.”

The Hamas Charter, written and published in 1988, fully adopts this narrative. Article 11 of the Charter presents the land of Palestine as Muslim *waqf* land, belonging to the Muslim *umma* until the end of time. As such, it is land that belongs to any person, organization, or state. It was conquered by Muslims in the early days of Islam and consecrated by Caliph Omar Bin al-Kutub. Article 12 highlights the fact that merely by virtue of that history, the Palestinian national claim to the land for the Palestinian people is valid.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Sheikh Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwῑ, head of the “International Union for Muslim Scholars” and the most respected theologian by Ḥamas,[[32]](#footnote-32) writes about the theological roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He sees it as a religious war between Judaism and Islam, a battle over the inheritance between the two sons of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael. Qarḍāwῑ questions the Jewish claim to the land of Palestine as based on God’s promise to Abraham and his children, arguing that Abraham never legally owned as much as one inch of the land. Otherwise, why did he have to buy a plot in order to bury his wife Sarah when she died? Is there such a thing as a person buying his own property? Furthermore, continues Qarḍāwῑ, Isaac and Jacob went down to Egypt. They were not the owners of the land. The land was occupied by the Children of Israel only during the time of David, and then only for a short period. Adding that Muslims controlled the land from the 7th through to the 20th century, Qarḍāwῑ argues that this was the true realization of Allāh’s promise to Abraham. Is not Ishmael also from the seed of Abraham?, asks Qarḍāwῑ. In addition, one does not belong to Abraham’s family only biologically; there is a fundamental spiritual belonging. Qarḍāwῑ quotes: “The people most deserving of Abraham are those who followed him and this Prophet and those who believe. God is the Guardian of the Believers” (Q 3:68) This verse follows an argument between the People of the Book (Jews) and Muslims, who truly observe Abraham’s tradition (Q 3:65–68). According to Qarḍāwῑ, the Torah was brought down from Heaven to the Children of Israel only during the time of Moses. This means, then, that the Children of Israel did not truly follow in the footsteps of Abraham. Muslims did do so, and are therefore the true Believers. Consequently, they are the legal inheritors of the land, based on the rights of their father Abraham. Qarḍāwῑ´s conclusion is that the Jews have no moral rights to the land. Rather, they occupied it by the force of the sword, by the use of violence, guided by their religion to do so.[[33]](#footnote-33)

An additional argument that Qarḍāwῑ uses in order to refute the Jewish right to the land is that the land – even prior to Abraham´s arrival – belonged to the “Arab Canaanites.[[34]](#footnote-34) The myth of the Canaanites has occupied an important place in the Palestinian narrative among the educated *Fataḥ* elite.[[35]](#footnote-35) Ḥamas initially resisted it. As an Islamic movement, relating their descent to the Canaanite heathens did not fit their agenda. However, as this myth began to spread among different Muslim writers, this narrative took root even with Hamas, and the Palestinians became the direct offspring of the Canaanites and the Jebusites, masters of Jerusalem until its occupation and integration to David’s kingdom.[[36]](#footnote-36)

And so, returning to the videoclip, Ḥamas goes even further and claims that the Palestinians pre-date Adam, the biblical first man, who the Qurʼan claims as Muslim. In fact, the Palestinians even pre-date Creation in their narration: “We have been here since the beginning of time even before the world was created” as the aforementioned song claims.

Reflecting the Palestinian mythical roots, Jews are represented as foreigners (“In this land you are foreigners”). Throughout the entire song, the only term used is “Zionists,” and there is a good reason for this. “Children of Israel” or “Jews” were not chosen, because about two-thirds of the Qurʼan tells stories about the Jews or the Children of Israel from the times of Muhammad, relating them to the “Holy Land” or the “Promised Land.”[[37]](#footnote-37) The Qurʼan, while not disputing that the Children of Israel were the Chosen People, does claim that this inheritance was lost due to their sins.[[38]](#footnote-38) The term “Children of Israel” also carries a positive connotation (see, for example, Qurʼan 2:40 and 47) and “Israel” is part of that term. To avoid such positive implications, Ḥamas gradually abandoned this terminology, thereby denying any historical linkage between the Children of Israel and contemporary Israel. According to Hamas, the biblical Children of Israel, those who were led by Moses, were a tribe that became extinct. Therefore, Hamas sees the present-day Israelis who claim to be the offspring of the original Children of Israel as actually the offspring of different nations – one of them– that converted to Judaism in the past.

The books of Ḥasan al-Bash,[[39]](#footnote-41) considered an expert in Judaism and Zionism, are a source of inspiration among different circles of the Palestinian society: Muslim Brotherhood and Ḥamās and Islamic Jihad movement in Palestine.[[40]](#footnote-42) In the last chapter of his book *The Qurʼān and the Torah: Where are the Agreements and where the Divisions?*[[41]](#footnote-44) titled “Jews of the Past and Those Who Became Jewish Today,” Al-Bash reviews Jewish history and the Diaspora, coming to the conclusion that “those who are called Jews today are actually part of seventeen different races.”[[42]](#footnote-45) After quoting various researchers, Al-Bash concludes that: “We see that even according to research, the founders of the exploitive Zionist government are Jews of Eastern Europe, offspring of the Khazars. They have no ties to this area in which the Jews of the past lived. Their gathering in this Land of Palestine and their occupation of it does not give them any biblical rights because the Torah, after all, is a collection of false narratives written at the time of the Babylonian Exile.”[[43]](#footnote-46)

A study by Sariel Birnbaum on the shaping of the Palestinian collective memory finds that claims that the Arabs can be traced back to Palestine since the dawn of time, while contemporary Jews have no link between to the ancient Hebrews, are common in the Palestinian media discourse. Jews are described as the offspring of non-Arab groups, such as the Khazars, who converted to Judaism and therefore arguably have no historical claim to Palestine.[[44]](#footnote-47)

The use of the term “Jews” is also problematic, since Ḥamas takes pains to note that they are not opposed to Judaism as a religion. “The Ḥamās movement’s objection to the occupation is not intended as an objection to Judaism as a religion, but rather as an objection to the occupation, its presence and the policies of oppression that it enforces.”[[45]](#footnote-48) That is, the struggle is against the Zionists as a colonial power. In addition, Ḥamas argues that Judaism is a religion and not a nationality and therefore cannot claim territorial ownership of any land. The term “the Jewish Nation” was allegedly invented by the Zionist movement in order to inspire Jews to immigrate to the Land of Israel, awakening their religious emotions. In order to accomplish this occupation, the land was seized from its true owners, the Muslims. And herein lies the paradox: Jews cannot claim ownership of Palestine because they are a religion and not a nation, but Ḥamas – a religious movement – defines its territorial limits on a religious basis.

The word “believers” appears frequently throughout the *This Land is Our Land* clip in association with Ḥamas heroes whose deaths are not in vain. According to the Qurʼan, victory is determined not by military superiority, but by moral superiority and faith. Therefore, the soldiers of Ḥamas are “our heroes, the Believers” as opposed to Jews, portrayed in the Qurʼan and in Islamic tradition as infidels, recklessly disrespectful of tradition.

The Qurʼan unleashes its unrelenting contempt for Jews through zoological metaphors: apes, pigs, donkeys laden with books and the like, because, says the Qurʼan, Jews did not keep the Sabbath and discarded the Torah (Q. 62: 6-8; 7:163).[[46]](#footnote-49) Morally inferior, Jews can never win in war, since victory belongs only to the faithful. This idea is expressed in Q. 2:249 in the context of the confrontation between David and Goliath. “How oft by Allāh’s will hath a small force vanquished a big one? Allāh is with those who steadfastly persevere.”[[47]](#footnote-50) It is this belief that lies behind the true crisis of faith that afflicted the entire Muslim world after Israel’s stunning victory in the 1967 Six-Day War. In 1968, an international conference of Muslim theologians was held at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo to discuss the chasm between reality and theology. Arab armies had been attacked repeatedly by an ever-stronger Israel. Has Allāh abandoned the Muslims? The theological solution suggested was that Allāh was gathering the Diaspora Jews in Palestine – albeit in the heart of the Muslim world – in order to make it easier for Muslims to eliminate them.[[48]](#footnote-51)

An analysis of *This Land is Our Land* clip shows that its message is based primarily on Hamas’s religious and historical claims. Furthermore, the message was transmitted in a way that cannot possibly create any significant impression on Israeli society. Rather, it includes the national and religious beliefs of Hamas, simply translated into Hebrew. It was no coincidence that it had zero influence on the Israeli side.

***Third message: The Israeli fear of death***

While a war of arms was being waged on the field during the Pillar of Defense Operation, a virtual war was being waged between the IDF and Ḥamas through Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.[[49]](#footnote-52) Ḥamas produced many videos and posters in full color, all in faulty Hebrew. One of the clips, *Wait for Us Soon*,”[[50]](#footnote-53) opens with the phrase “from the Palestinian People to the Zionists” and continues with “we missed the suicide bombers.” At the same time, the screen is filled with images of buses going up in flames, massive rocket shootings, and strong Ḥamas soldiers engaged in battle, accompanied by deafening battle noise. The narrator continues: “Wait for us, coming to you soon in bus stations and coffee shops. From the Al-Qassam battalions to the Zionists: Don’t sleep because we may come to you while you are sleeping.” The Hebrew text is written backwards and the translation in Arabic appears below it. The clip ends with a message threatening the IDF soldiers waiting to enter Gaza: “To the Zionist soldiers: advance, brave ones; advance, brave ones; advance brave ones – in order to be killed!” These words are followed by scenes of injured soldiers being carried away, the dramatic background music intensifying the tension.

The words “advance, brave ones” refer to the days during which the IDF was deployed along the Gaza Strip border. The political leadership hesitated to give the order to enter, for fear that a field battle would result in many casualties. Again, Jewish fear and love of life are used as a pawn. The Qurʼan describes the Jewish love of life as hedonism because of their “eat, drink and be merry” attitude, and claims that the Jews believe that that as the chosen people of God, only they have the right to the next world. If that were true, however, the Qur’an argues that the Jews should have aspired to die for their faith. But they do not, they are afraid, and they would never aspire to death; they are “more eager to live than any other people” (Qurʼān 62: 6–8; 2: 94–6). Ismail Haniyeh, explained to *The Washington Post* in an interview that: “The Jews love life more than anyone else, they prefer not to die.”[[51]](#footnote-54) Unlike the Jews, the Muslims, as portrayed in the Qurʼan, are the true believers, for they do not fear sacrificing their lives for the sake of God (*fῑ sabῑl Allāh*). On the contrary, they yearn for martyrdom (*Shahāda*), achieved only through their death. For Palestinian society, the warrior represents the Muslim nation and fights in order to hallow Allāh and Islam; a man’s life is only secondary in their worldview.[[52]](#footnote-55)

Returning to the clip, the destiny of the “brave” Zionist soldiers will be the death that they fear, just as written in the Qurʼan: “The death from which ye flee will truly overtake you.” (Q. 62:8)

The idea that Jews love life and fear death is repeated in another Hebrew clip Hamas uploaded. This one, *Hamas Soldiers Love Death More Than the Jews Love Life*,[[53]](#footnote-56) declares, “From the Al-Qassam Brigades to the Zionist soldiers: Al-Qassam Brigades love death more than you love life.” The visuals depict brave armed Al-Qassam soldiers facing bitterly weeping IDF soldiers (apparently crying over the loss in battle of brothers-in-arms). In contrast, the ʿIzz ad-dīn al-Qassam soldiers are courageous, heroic, and unhesitant about sacrificing their lives for their land. Hamas, a spinoff of the Muslim Brotherhood, draws heavily on the heritage of Hassan al-Bana, the Brotherhood’s founder. One of al-Bana’s most famous essays, “ṣināʿat al-mawt,” was written specifically to encourage Muslim Brotherhood members to go fight for Palestine. In this essay, al-Bana exhorts readers not to fear death. On the contrary, one must strive to ensure that one’s death is worthy in Allah’s eyes. Death in jihad for Allah is honorable and the defense of Palestine is a commandment of the highest importance for Muslims.[[54]](#footnote-57)

The most famous example of Hamas’s PSYWAR against Israel in the 2014 Operation Protective Edge is the videoclip *Attack, Carry Out Attacks*. The lyrics are:

Chorus: [repeated several times during the song after each stanza]

Attack, carry out attacks

Shake [them up], shock

Wipe out the Zionists

Shock Israel’s security

[The opening four lines are also the chorus, repeated several times throughout the song.]

Strive for contact with the Zionists

Burn [military] camps and soldiers

Shock Israel’s security

With Vulcan’s fiery flames

A nation of weakness and deceit

They can’t stand up to war

They are as exposed as spider webs

Upon encountering knights

Shock Israel’s security

Set aflame its core like a smelter

Make it collapse to its foundations

Exterminate the cockroach nest

Expel all the Zionists

Zionist hearts – each one turns

In a different direction, they are not united

Terrified of death, they hide

Behind walls and fortifications

An army of illusion, no good

Obsolescent and loathsome

Its soldiers like mice in a dry field

Their death approaches – fire on them

Rain down tons of missiles on them already

Make their world a terror to behold

Burn a great miracle in their consciousness

Because they are expelled while we stay

This song, designed to encourage the spirit of the home crowd, repeating the familiar messages: cowardice and weakness of the Israeli enemy, comparable to a network of spider webs, the love of life of the Israelis, and their fear of death. This description of the enemy is the antithesis of the Ḥamas heroes, who fight bravely until the last drop of blood of the last warrior is spilled.

It would seem that in this videoclip, some effort was made to phrase the messages in a way that would suit the Israeli ear. For example, the expression “spider web” echoes the phrase coined by Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah with regard to Israel.

On May 26 2000, Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s Secretary General, delivered a famous speech in which he declared: “This Israel, that owns nuclear weapons and the strongest air force in this region, is more fragile than a spider web.”[[55]](#footnote-58) Nasrallah gave this victory speech as part of the celebrations for Israel’s unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon in the town of Bint Jbeil, which the IDF had left the day before. These words capture a basic conception of Israel: despite its military might, Israel lacks the social resilience and spiritual-moral willpower necessary to fight and defeat its enemies. The phrase is based on a verse from the Qurʼan (29:41): “The parable of those who take protectors other than God Is that of the Spider, who builds (to itself) A house; but truly the flimsiest of houses is the Spider’s house; If they but knew.”

Here, too, we see the connection between the weakness of those living in a spider web and those who have abandoned God. Hamas’s use of the term, then, reflects the perception that Israel is frightened and lacks the willpower to fight.

The fourth stanza in the clip reveals another layer of Hamas’s preconception about the weakness and fear it attributes to Israelis – namely divisiveness. According to the song, “Zionist hearts – each one turns / In a different direction, they are not united,” with this is contextualized with the next lines, “Terrified of death, they hide / Behind walls and fortifications.” For Hamas, these words mean that there is a direct link between fear and Israeli society’s lack of solidarity. As Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, Hamas’s founder, wrote:

When you see them united, know that the only thing holding them together is personal interests. Nothing else succeeds in bringing them together. We know that the state of Israel is not united and never will be. What unites them is their fear for their lives. If this fear disappears, each one will go his own way.[[56]](#footnote-59)

Not only does the entire song echo Hamas’s own assumptions and opinions, but it is also written in a way that is not adapted to the Israeli audience. It is composed in poetic language with forced rhymes, and uses archaic expressions that mean nothing to the average Israeli, such as the Hebrew phrase, translated as obsolete– *avad alav hakelah,* (obsolete)– which is adapted from Job 30:2 and is generally considered antiquated. Similarly, the music, with its very distinct Arabic rhythm and style, does not speak to large segments of Israeli society. The heavy Arabic accent of the singer also does nothing to add to the authenticity of the messages.

Therefore, not only did the videoclip fail to weaken and discourage Israeli society, but it actually aroused ridicule and mockery, becoming a “hit” with many parodic versions,[[57]](#footnote-60) even being used as a tune for Jewish liturgical passages, such as “Lekha Dodi,” a song sung in synagogues on Friday nights, and Hassidic music.[[58]](#footnote-61) This videoclip also failed, both in terms of its messages and its style, to harm Israeli society in any way.

**Hamas’s PSYWAR as a Projective Psychological Warfare (PPW)**

In light of the preceding analysis, and to offer deeper insights into Hamas’s PSYWAR activity against the Israeli public as manifested in the videoclips the organization posted between 2007 and 2014, we would like to define a new concept – Projective Psychological Warfare (PPW). Projection is a concept from the field of psychology originating with Sigmund Freud, who defined it as a defense mechanism:

The projection outwards of internal perceptions is a primitive mechanism, to which, for instance, our sense perceptions are subject, and which therefore normally plays a very large part in determining the form taken by our external world.[[59]](#footnote-62)

Over time, however, the concept of projection has acquired a broader meaning:

Projection is a popular concept in everyday discourse as well as in psychological thought. In its simplest form, it refers to seeing one’s own traits in other people. A more rigorous understanding involves perceiving others as having traits that one inaccurately believes oneself not to have. As a broad form of influence of self-concept on person perception, projection may be regarded as more a cognitive bias than a defense mechanism.[[60]](#footnote-63)

The three basic elements constituting PSYWAR are the target audience, the messages, and the means of transmission.[[61]](#footnote-64) In light of these elements, we propose defining PPW as a phenomenon in which the side engaging in PSYWAR transmits its messages, both in content and in form, in a way that is consistent with its own assumptions and characteristics rather than in a way adapted to the assumptions and characteristics of its target audience. When the target audience is the enemy, which almost invariably differs from the side engaging in PSYWAR in fundamental ways – its culture, point of view, and foundational assumptions and worldviews – what emerges is a distinct lack of congruence between the appropriate message and appropriate language for the transmission of the message, on the one hand, and the message and means of transmission in practice, on the other. This gap almost makes it almost inevitable that the particular PSYWAR will be ineffective and possibly even backfire, proving detrimental to the cause it is meant to be promoting.

An overall view of the videoclips used as part of Hamas’s PSYWAR and analyzed here shows that the target audience was without a doubt Israeli society, as these clips were translated into Hebrew. Nonetheless, the other two elements of PSYWAR clearly demonstrate the lack of congruence between the intended target of this PSYWAR and its realization. Regarding the platforms for transmitting the message, generally speaking, it is more difficult to find ways to transmit PSYWAR messages when the target audience is the enemy, as it is a priori more complicated to reach the target audience in such a way that the messages are accepted rather than rejected out of hand. Even so, the way that Hamas conducted its PSYWAR – simply uploading the videoclips to YouTube and Hamas’s own sites without transmitting them in a more sophisticated, segmented way, such as via WhatsApp or Facebook groups, etc.) – meant that exposure to them was random or the result of elements of the Israeli media acting as the interface. This, then, prevented unmediated, widespread, direct contact between the messages and the target audience.

As for the messages, Hamas did not adapt them to its target audience, with the result representing a clear case of PPW. The messages consisted of the organization’s own assumptions and beliefs, which it tried to transmit to the Israeli side, by using them to formulate the videoclips’ texts and the visuals. Hamas seems to have made no effort to articulate the message in appropriate Hebrew tailored to contemporary Israeli society, especially in terms of register and terminology. It appears that the organization expressed the message based on its own worldview and not on the way it would be heard on the Israeli side.

As we see in the case of Hamas, the outcome of PPW is ineffective PSYWAR. Whatever resources were invested in the effort, they were entirely wasted. Moreover, as we saw here, in some cases, PPW can become a double-edged sword. In addition to failing to be transmitted to the enemy or influence them, the Hamas PSYWAR messages were deemed shallow and were subjected to parodies, thus painting the PSYWAR actor in less-than-flattering colors. PPW, when employed against an enemy target audience, not only fails to intensify the threat and deterrence; it also erodes the standing of the side using it, which becomes perceived as unserious and inconsequential.

We must therefore ask why Hamas engaged in projection-based PSYWAR. We suggest that a possible explanation may lie in understanding the three major features of Hamas: its firm Islamist ideology; its fundamentalism; and its position as a non-state actor.

First, Ḥamas is a religious movement with Islam at the core of its inspiration. The importance of religion is postulated in the first paragraph of the Ḥamas covenant: “The Islamic Resistance Movement: Islam is its path and from that path the movement takes its ideas, concepts, perceptions about the present, about life and about Man. It relies on Islam for all its actions, and seeks inspiration in order to guide it in its path.”[[62]](#footnote-65) The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is considered by Ḥamas to be a conflict of religion, a continuation of the Islamic war against the Jews of Medina and their offspring.[[63]](#footnote-66)

Bearing in mind its firm ideological worldview to which it is fully committed, one can understand why Hamas finds it difficult to step into the shoes of the Israeli side and consider the right way to communicate. Even Sheikh al-Qardāwῑ, a spiritual authority figure for Hamas, warned of this:

We are not performing well in our confrontation with our enemy because […] we have not really tried to know his character, to examine it closely […] What is his world view regarding religions, values, people? We have not learned what really influences the character of the enemy in order to know how he thinks, how he makes plans and carries them out. We do not know what he wants and how he achieves what he wants. Perhaps at present we know something of what was hidden in the past, but we still have not attained the knowledge that we should have attained, as far as knowledge of the enemy is concerned.[[64]](#footnote-67)

The second feature of Hamas is the fact that it is a fundamentalist Islamic movement, one that sees Islam and the Qurʼan as the only valid way of life for both the individual and for society in general, and strives to fully impose Islamic culture and law.[[65]](#footnote-68) Here, too, an expression of this ambition may be found in Hamas’s own charter: “Allah is [the organization’s] target, the Prophet is its model, the Koran its constitution: Jihad is its path and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of its wishes … Thus, when Islam is absent from the arena, everything changes … homelands will be returned [to their owners] and the calls of the muezzins will be heard from its mosques emerge declaring the establishment of Islamic state, so that people and things will all return to their rightful places … There is no solution for the Palestinian problem except through Jihad.”[[66]](#footnote-69) As a fundamentalist organization, Hamas has a clear black-and-white division of the world, a testament to a rigidity of thought that may contribute to its difficulty in understanding the other side.

Furthermore, the organization’s third feature, that of being a non-state actor, means that it operates differently than states in several ways.[[67]](#footnote-70) In our context, nations have professional, well-developed intelligence agencies and PSYOPS institutions that, given a good organizational culture and appropriate working mechanisms, have professional processes whereby the target of any proposed PSYWAR is studied, analyzed, and dissected. While Hamas does operate organized propaganda bodies, it lacks professional state thinking in the field. Its military intelligence bodies, especially in the period this essay discusses, were only starting to be established and institutionalized,[[68]](#footnote-71) rising at best to the level of a sub-state organization during this time.

These three factors combined may explain the difficulty Hamas has in maintaining professional processes of study and examination of PSYWAR messages aimed at the Israeli audience, whether from lack of ability or from lack of openness of thought required to think like the enemy. This is not to say that Hamas cannot correctly identify certain characteristics of Israeli society, such as the nation’s sensitivity to loss of life, both civilian and military. However, it has not yet succeeded in translating its understanding into an effective transmission of messages in the context of its PSYWAR on Israel. In this context, Hamas’s practical actions in this sphere, in the form of abducting soldiers and executing attacks, is much more effective for its ends. In contrast, its PSYWAR does not enhance the force of its practical activity; in fact, it often detracts from it.

**Conclusion**

This essay defines and analyzes a phenomenon that occurs in conflicts in which PSYWAR is an important component – Projective Psychological Warfare (PPW). In PPW, the PSYWAR operator expresses its own assumptions and characteristics instead of transmitting messages suited to the target audience and influencing that audience to meet the operator’s objectives. This conclusion is based on an analysis of a significant component of Hamas’s PSYWAR against Israel: videoclips Hamas produced for the Israeli audience during the period it was establishing itself as the governing entity of the Gaza Strip.

This research may also be viewed within a broader context of the conflict: the image of the enemy and its process of learning. This component is important in several aspects of warfare, including assessing intelligence on the enemy’s future actions, planning the next campaign, analyzing underlying trends, and understanding processes occurring to it, as well as identifying opportunities for settling or at least reducing conflicts. The ability to step into the enemy’s shoes, then, is highly important for understanding the campaign correctly, making appropriate decisions, and applying force effectively, including in the sphere of PSYWAR.

This study also analyzes the possible reasons for PPW, considering the features of its operator in the case study – in this case, Hamas, a non-state actor with a fundamentalist Islamist ideology. Nonetheless, given the framework created in this study, it would prove interesting to examine to phenomenon in future PSYWAR actions carried out by nations in general and democracies in particular – regarding the very existence of the phenomenon and its impact, and the reasons for it, in light of the different features of the players in the conflicts.

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