**“Asymmetric Doubling”: A Terror Organization Using the Method of Doubling Sources against a State-The Case of Palestinian Hamas against Israeli Intelligence**

All political and military organizations need intelligence to inform their activities. By definition, terrorist organizations operate asymmetrically against states. They seek to attain substantive results by inflicting harm on their enemies to obtain political objectives. Because the conflict is asymmetrical, a terrorist organization – as the weaker player – wants to generate achievements of the greatest impact using the most efficient means, given the organization’s poverty of resources compared with those of its enemy.[[1]](#footnote-1) This holds true for all military aspects of a conflict, including, of course, intelligence.

The theoretical and historical research tends to focus on intelligence operations by states rather than by non-state players,[[2]](#footnote-2) which constitute a significant portion of non-state players. [[3]](#footnote-3) This is true also with regard to research on counterintelligence designed to maintain a terrorist organization’s clandestine nature, a critical component of the longevity of such groups. [[4]](#footnote-4) While some papers seeking to shed light on the topic have been written in the last decade, there is still a large lacuna in the academic discourse.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The basic definition of a double agent is an “agent in contact with two opposing intelligence services, only one of which is aware of the double contact or quasi-intelligence services.”[[6]](#footnote-6) In practice, the double agent represents the intersection between intelligence and counterUNTERד להצמד למושגים המקצועיים, זה קריטי. הפעילות המודיעינית של חזבאללה וחמאס בתחומים השונים ולאורך תקופות הזמן השונות. דעת בintelligence. On the one hand, doubling the agent stops him from being operated by the enemy and therefore acts as a counter effort. On the other hand, the double agent is a tool for gathering intelligence against the other side, making the double agent a HUMINT source in every respect.[[7]](#footnote-7)This is why the doubling of agents is called “the caviar of the intelligence business,”[[8]](#footnote-8) and is one of most sophisticated methods for carrying out counterintelligence.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Despite the complexity of the method, the Palestinian Hamas Movement, as a non-state actor, has used it quite successfully on more than one occasion in its struggle against the State of Israel. For decades, Palestinian society has had to deal with the phenomenon of people from its ranks becoming intelligence sources working for Israel (“collaborators”).[[10]](#footnote-10) Since its founding in December 1987, Hamas has had to cope with Israeli intelligence efforts to penetrate its organization and uncover its secrets. Like other armed Palestinian groups in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip, Hamas, from its earliest days, has prioritized the identification and targeting of collaborators with Israel.[[11]](#footnote-11) This focus includes the establishment of an apparatus named al-Majd for gathering information on Palestinians suspected of being collaborators. The Hamas practice has been to apply different degrees of torture and abuse, including damaging the property of suspected collaborators. Many suspects have been kidnapped, interrogated, tortured, and killed, although many of them were not, in fact, collaborators.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In some cases, Hamas has chosen a different tactic: to exploit collaborators and transform a threat into an opportunity by turning some collaborators into double agents and using them to advance the organization's goals. This article examines some of the doubling operations carried out by Hamas on Israeli collaborators over the last three decades. Examining these cases reveals how Hamas’s doubling methods developed concurrently with the movement's evolution.

This research is based on various sources, in both Hebrew and Arabic, including official Hamas publications and official Israeli sources, such as judicial proceedings. Some of these materials have not yet been given serious attention by scholars in the field. Secondary literature and journalistic sources are used herein both to provide necessary background and to present a more complete picture of Hamas doubling activities. This study’s unique contribution lies in that it explores the ways in which violent non-state actors can use doubling of sources as part of their asymmetric war against states. In addition, this study sheds light on an interesting aspect of Hamas’s counterintelligence activity, an important component of its struggle against Israel.

**Doubling Operations in the 1990s: Assassinating Handlers**

Hamas was founded in December 1987 when the first intifada broke out in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. Building on a widespread organizational infrastructure deeply embedded in Palestinian society, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin established an umbrella organization that united all activity carried out at his behest, both civilian and military. During the years of the first intifada, Hamas operated in a decentralized manner, its cells scattered, carrying out many attacks against Israeli civilians and security personnel. In response, Israel dealt it many heavy blows in the form of assassinations and arrests of hundreds of activists.[[13]](#footnote-13) Still, as Yaakov Perry, then the director of the Israel Security Agency (aka the Shin Bet), said, “More than any other organization, Hamas was capable of recovering from every setback with astounding speed.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

During the first intifada, in tandem with the struggle against Israel, Palestinian society was torn by a multisided conflict. In this context, the accusation of collaborating with Israel was one of the most common Palestinian pretexts used in mutual attacks. The term “collaborator” took on several meanings and was not necessarily reserved only for people involved in counterintelligence. Many were suspected of being Israeli agents and consequently kidnapped, beaten, and executed.[[15]](#footnote-15) Hamas attributed great importance to the issue, as evidenced by the organization’s 1988 charter, which states that the organization welcomes every Muslim who fulfills certain conditions, one of which is “maintaining [the group’s] confidentiality.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

Before the organization was officially established, the al-Majd[[17]](#footnote-17) apparatus was set up in 1986 in order to, inter alia, identify and neutralize anyone suspected of collaborating with Israel. Based on the *fatwa* that Sheikh Yassin issued permitting the neutralization of collaborators, the organization tracked suspects during the intifada, abducted them, interrogated them, and executed them after extracting confessions from them (though suspects were not necessarily guilty of the acts of which they were accused).[[18]](#footnote-18) Towards the end of the intifada, Hamas adopted a different method, namely doubling collaborators and exploiting them to attain its goals.

The first such operation took place in 1993. The Israeli authorities arrested Maher Abu Srur for being a member of Hamas and supporting its activities in the first intifada. In December 1992, after his release from Israeli prison, he was recruited by the Shin Ben as a collaborator. His primary mission was to gather information about terrorists living in his refugee camp, al-A'aidah, near Bethlehem. During the time he collaborated, he grew remorseful for spying on his own people and therefore confessed his connection with Israel to other Hamas members. They decided to exploit this connection, telling Abu Srur that he would have to kill Moshe Nahmani, his handler, to atone for his sin.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Abu Srur agreed and embarked on the operation accompanied by two cousins. He made an appointment to meet Nahmani on January 3, 1993, at a Shin Bet safe house in Jerusalem’s Rehavia neighborhood. When Nahmani arrived, the three accomplices ambushed and attacked him. He died after being stabbed with a knife and hit with a hammer. The three took Nahmani's bag, which according to Hamas’s version contained information about other collaborators (later used to unmask them) and fled to Bethlehem. Subsequently, on several occasions, Abu Srur managed to slip away from Israeli security forces pursuing him. But on July 1, 1993, he and two other men participated in a failed attack on a bus in Jerusalem. Abu Srur was killed in an exchange of gunfire with Israeli soldiers.[[20]](#footnote-20)

About a year after the first operation, Hamas conducted another similar attack. On December 22, 1993, Hamas killed two Israelis as a part of a series of revenge attacks in response to the assassination of a senior member of the organization's military wing, Imad ‘Aql. While investigating this attack, Israel arrested members of terror organizations in the area. One of the detainees was ‘Abd al-Mun‘aim Abu Hamid, a student at Bir Zeit University’s Department of Literature. He was interrogated for three weeks by the Shin Bet, during which he agreed to collaborate with Israel and gather information Israel desired. His handler was Noam Cohen, nicknamed Captain Majdi. Cohen had joined the Shin Bet in the early 1990s and was considered as a brilliant young handler.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Abu Hamid’s consent to collaborate with Israel was a sham. Behind the backs of his Israeli bosses, Abu Hamid informed Hamas members with whom he was in contact of his connection with the Shin Bet. They in turn consulted with higher-ups on the right way to make the most of the situation. A subsequent Hamas claim indicates that one of the participants in this consultation was Yahya 'Aiyash, also known as “the engineer” and that he determined the course of action. 'Aiyash decided to exploit Abu Hamid’s connection for assassinations rather than intelligence operations, such as transmitting misinformation or learning about the Shin Bet’s modus operandi. Nevertheless, Hamas claimed that before Cohen’s assassination, Abu Hamid managed to get some valuable information about Shin Bet methods and other Palestinian collaborators, in addition to plying Cohen with misinformation.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Cohen and Abu Hamid met a few times. In these meetings, Cohen gave Abu Hamid some money that he used to buy the gun with which he would eventually kill Cohen. After planning the operation’s details, Abu Hamid called Cohen and told him that he had some valuable information. He asked for a meeting, which was scheduled for February 13, 1994, at the old industrial zone near Bituniya. That afternoon, Cohen arrived with his two bodyguards in his private Mercedes. Abu Hamid was waiting behind a wall; when he saw the car, he signaled his two partners and they opened fire on the vehicle. Cohen was seriously injured and was rushed to the hospital. He died on the operating table. Three days after the operation, Hamas released movie clip in which Abu Hamid reported the particulars of the operation.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Abu Hamid and his partners escaped the scene with the Israeli security forces in pursuit. Abu Hamid's partners were found on February 24. One of them was killed where he was hiding; the other was arrested and sentenced to four life sentences (he was released in the Shalit prisoner exchange in October 2011). Abu Hamid eluded capture for another three months, but was finally was captured in a shelter in the village of al-Ram and killed in a shoot-out with Israeli security personnel.[[24]](#footnote-24)

**Doubling Operations in the 2000s: Tempting Military Targets**

The second intifada broke out in September 2000 consequent to the failure of the Camp David process. Hamas was gradually becoming a significant entity in the armed resistance to Israel and the organization was perpetrating large-scale terror attacks. Once again, despite Israel’s attempts to apprehend and neutralize its leaders and activists, Hamas managed to plan and execute assaults. After a mass-casualty attack on the night of the Passover Seder at the Park Hotel in Netanya in April 2002, Israel embarked on Operation Defensive Shield during which it reoccupied Judea and Samaria and largely dismantled Hamas’s infrastructures there. Hamas continued to operate and Israel continued to attack the organization, including assassinating Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in March 2004. Given then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s declaration of intent to withdraw IDF forces from the Gaza Strip, Hamas began a gradual build-up of its infrastructures there to prepare for the post-withdrawal period. After the disengagement in the summer of 2005, the organization’s military wing grew ever more established, turning into a relatively orderly hierarchy. In January 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian Authority election, though Fatah retained control of the governing apparatus for about another year and a half.[[25]](#footnote-25)

During those years, the Palestinians continued to pursue those suspected of collaborating with Israel. The PA’s security services, founded in the mid-1990s, arrested, interrogated, and tried such suspects; in some cases, the suspects were brutally tortured.[[26]](#footnote-26) Despite this, Hamas continued its own hunt for collaborators, using similar tactics it had employed in the preceding decade: gathering intelligence on the suspects, interrogating them, and then murdering them.[[27]](#footnote-27) As a result of the organization’s military development in the Gaza Strip between 2004 and Hamas’s seizure of the Strip in the summer of 2007, we can discern more advanced doubling activity as demonstrated by the cases described below.

On December 7, 2004, Hamas carried out an operation called “penetrating arrow” (*al-sahm al-thaqib*) honoring the anniversary of the first intifada. In the months before the operation, Hamas dug a tunnel in the eastern part of Gaza City and in it planted a powerful bomb consisting of a ton and a half of explosive material. On the day of the action, IDF forces entered the Gaza Strip to carry out searches in the tunnel area. After the forces started working at the target location, the bomb exploded, killing one IDF soldier and wounding four others.[[28]](#footnote-28)

After the operation, it emerged that the force entered the Strip to carry out searches on the basis of concrete intelligence the IDF had received about the existence of the tunnel or the presence of a senior Hamas official in the region. However, the information the IDF had received was false – provided by a Palestinian double agent. That agent transmitted the information as bait to draw the IDF to the location and trap them next to the explosives. It should be pointed out that, in this particular case, it is impossible to determine if the agent was an Israeli whom Hamas had turned, or a proactive Hamas action to have the Shin Bet recruit a double agent. Based on the formulation of its post-action statements, Hamas seems to have claimed the latter.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The second incident was even more sophisticated. In mid-2006, Israeli intelligence recruited a Gaza Strip resident[[30]](#footnote-30) to serve as an intelligence source. A month or so later, during which the source transmitted information about Hamas activity to his Israeli handlers, the source contacted a Hamas operative, Nizmi Z'arub, and reported to him that he was working for Israel intelligence. Z'arub proposed that the source work as a double agent. For the next four months, the source reported to Hamas every act the Israelis asked him to do. As part of the source’s relationship with Hamas, he was supposed to direct his handlers on how to reach the home of a Hamas operative sought by the Israeli security services. At the same time, other Hamas members would set a trap for the IDF soldiers, booby trap the operative’s home, and ambush the Israeli force coming to apprehend the operative. The source did in fact tell his Israeli handler where the Hamas operative’s home was located, but when the Israeli force arrived, the operative was not at home, and the IDF proceeded to destroy the house. No force was used against the IDF.[[31]](#footnote-31)

At a later stage, the source was operated by Hamas member Muhammad Abu Harb, who tracked and recorded the source’s conversations with his Israeli handlers after the source inserted his SIM card into Abu Harb's phone. He instructed the source how to answer questions from the Israeli handler. On several occasions, the source, directed by his Hamas handlers, gave his Israeli handlers false information on locations hosting Hamas activity or Hamas operatives (especially in Khan Yunis area) so as to entice IDF forces to come out. These would then be attacked by Hamas soldiers lying in wait or be blown up by booby traps in the houses. During this period, the source even offered his Israeli handler to recruit his two brothers to work with Israeli intelligence; in practice, the intention was to use them as double agents. Subsequently, the Israeli handler established contact with them, but the outcome of these attempts is unknown.[[32]](#footnote-32)

After Muhammad Abu Harb’s death, the source was handled directly by Ra’ed al-'Atar, a regional brigade commander and a senior Hamas activist who gave the source a new cell phone and instructed him to report everything concerning his activities with his Israeli intelligence. Al-'Atar also planned for the source to transmit false information to the Israelis about the presence of Hamas people in the Sufa area. The idea was to attract Israeli soldiers to the locale and abduct one. Furthermore, the source gave al-'Atar personal information about Gaza Strip residents whom the source suspected of collaborating with Israeli intelligence.[[33]](#footnote-33) Eventually, the source was arrested by Israeli authorities.

**Doubling in the 2010s: Long-Term Organized Doubling Operations**

In June 2007, Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip. After some brutal, bloody street battles, Hamas emerged victorious, becoming the de facto sovereign of the Gaza Strip. From that point on, Hamas gradually developed a centralized government that wields a heavy hand to enforce public order as it sees fit.[[34]](#footnote-34) Once it was in charge of ruling the Strip, Hamas also made giant strides in developing its military wing, which was now able to operate much more freely as the defending army of the territory controlled by the organization. The military wing became ever more professional. It established separate departments, including an intelligence department charged with gathering and analyzing intelligence about Israel to further Hamas’s needs.

Alongside its military intelligence department, Hamas established some government apparatus to achieve sovereignty. To do so, it exploited capabilities that came into its possession when it seized control of the Palestinian Authority’s headquarters during the insurrection. One of these mechanisms was the Internal Security Force (ISF), in practice the counterintelligence service of the Hamas regime. By using these apparatus, Hamas institutionalized its activities against suspected collaborators. The ISF used the tools at its disposal to identify suspects, jail them, try them, and carry out their sentences, which included executions in the city square. In tandem, Hamas’s familiar method of doubling agents took on a far more sophisticated nature as described below.

Between 2016 and 2018, Hamas ran an intelligence operation against Israeli intelligence, which included deploying a double agent. The incident began when a Hamas security entity identified an Israeli intelligence effort to recruit a Gaza Strip individual known only by the initial N. Somehow, Hamas personnel and N. established contact. At first, N. was frightened by the situation, but the Hamas handlers calmed him and shared with him information about a planned operation designed to mislead the Israelis, an operation in which he would act as a double agent. Hamas assigned the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades to take the lead on the operation. Based on the symbols appearing in the movie clip *Illusions*, which tells the story from the Hamas perspective, the operatives were in fact members of the organization’s military intelligence department.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Hamas began to record the conversations between Israeli intelligence and N., first instructing N. on how to respond to his Israeli handlers and how to conduct himself in their presence. The recorded conversation shows, for example, how Kamal, N.’s Israeli handler, asks him about the findings of a certain mission he was asked to undertake. The handler also wants to know if N. was interrogated at the checkpoint en route to the meeting. At the end of the conversation, the handler calms N. down and tells him to continue to behave normally. From the conversations between N. and his Israeli handlers, Hamas realized that Israel, with N.’s help, intended to destroy the organization’s store of rockets by identifying Hamas rocket launch sites when the conflict escalated as well as attacking them preemptively.[[36]](#footnote-36)

In light of this, Hamas decided to implement a deception by operating N. as a double agent. By doing so, the organization would be able to track the subjects of interest to Israeli intelligence, learn about its means and methods, surprise it by countering its actions, and undermine the confidence it had in its ability to gather intelligence from inside Hamas. Thus, for example, Hamas recorded a conversation between N. and his Israeli handler in which the handler teaches N. how to use a hidden camera for intelligence gathering. Hamas realized that the source was being dispatched not only to mark rocket launch sites, but also to photograph the rockets themselves so that the Israelis could learn the models Hamas had, their ranges, and their number. All of the answers N. brought back to his Israeli handlers were inaccurate and had been dictated to him by Hamas’s intelligence.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Later on, Israeli intelligence directed N. to a dead letter drop where he was supposed to collect equipment and tools that had been hidden for him there. In subsequent conversation, Hamas learned of the location of the equipment and the way in which N. was instructed to approach the location while taking all the necessary precautions, i.e. making sure that there was no traffic and that he was not being observed while doing the pick-up. Only then was N. asked to begin using these tools to damage the rockets to render them inoperable. The handler explained to N. how to use the drill now in his possession to achieve that goal. N. did as he had been told, but performed the work on pre-selected rockets Hamas has placed in locations of its choosing to allow the organization to track N. and thus study the drones Israel operated in Gaza’s skies to follow N.’s movements. Hamas was able to attain in-depth knowledge of all the tools and instruction methods used on agents operated by Israel. The organization obtained the training videos that N.’s Israeli handlers had sent him, which included detailed instructions on using the tools and various materials related to the work he was asked to do in order to damage Hamas rockets.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Hamas presented clear evidence that its deception was successfully executed and that N.'s Israeli handlers believed him to be working for them. In one conversation between Kamal and N., Kamal expressed his great appreciation for the work N. was doing on behalf of Israel. Kamal went so far as to transmit the praise heaped on N. by the sector chief in charge of the Gaza Strip and even the highest Israeli echelons. At a certain point, after N. had been a double agent for about two years, the Israeli side realized there was something amiss with N.’s deployment. In N.’s last conversation with the Israelis, the new Israeli handler – Munir – berated him for his conduct, in response to which N. contemptuously exclaimed that the Israelis’ operation had failed and that the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades had been aware of everything from the very beginning. To heighten the psychological effect, Hamas made a point of showing photos of rocket launches from the Gaza Strip and explaining that these were the very same rockets that N. had been told to disable, but that thanks to the organization’s successful doubling operation, they remained operable and had in fact been launched at Israel.[[39]](#footnote-39)

**Analysis: Hamas’s Doubling of Agents**

An analysis of the case studies cited above provides several fundamental insights about the advantages of doubling agents by a non-state entity in its asymmetric conflict with a state. The rationale of such entities may be characterized by five interrelated benefits: achieving direct access to the enemy’s core; obtaining high-quality intelligence and returning misdirecting intelligence; doing physical damage; damaging morale; and scoring points in the propaganda wars.

First, because the campaign it fights is asymmetric, the non-state entity suffers from inherent inferiority in intelligence resources and in operations to recruit agents and deploy them in the heart of the enemy state’s intelligence and operational institutions. By doubling agents, Hamas generates direct, available access to the intelligence institutions representing the greatest threat to it – Israeli intelligence, especially the Shin Bet. It has done so using a minimal investment of resources and eliminating critical stages in the recruitment cycle, namely spotting and evaluation.[[40]](#footnote-40) All Hamas has had to do is to using the agent’s own desire to be doubled and handled by Israeli intelligence, whether motivated by ideology or by the knowledge that Hamas does not take a favorable view of refusals. This advantage holds also for a state entity that doubles an agent, but in the context of asymmetric warfare, the difficulty in recruiting high-quality HUMINT and the paucity of general resources make doubling operations valuable in a very significant way.

Second, in terms of intel: by doubling agents, Hamas has managed to obtain diverse information about the work of Israeli intelligence. Hamas has learned about Israel’s recruitment methods, handling methods, and its means of communication with agents, and also about the existence of other agents. Moreover, by using more sophisticated doubling, Hamas has obtained significant data about the way Israel gathers intelligence and the objectives of that effort. It would have been very difficult, if not impossible, for Hamas to gain this information in other ways and it has been crucial in its activities. In these doubling operations, Hamas has even succeeded in transmitting misleading information to Israeli intelligence using a direct pipeline that, at least in the initial stages, was considered trustworthy. Furthermore, Hamas would have found it very hard to obtain these pipelines to transmit misleading information in any other way.

Another significant achievement has been the ability to attain operational successes as a result of having doubled agents. Most of these doubling operations led to harm or attempted harm to members of the Israeli security services. At the outset, these were Shin Bet handlers and, later on, IDF soldiers. The attacks executed by leading the Israeli forces into a trap – operations based on the work of the double agents – were meticulously planned. By doubling agents, Hamas obtained high-quality intelligence vital to the operation in which it was the proactive party: Hamas determined where and when it would attack, while Israel was caught off guard. The last case cited also led to an operational success as it neutralized Israel’s capacity to damage the organization’s rockets.

As a result of the substantive achievements at the operational and intelligence levels, Hamas’s double agent efforts generated a significant boost to activists' morale and a concomitant blow to the morale of the Israeli side. This was very obvious in the doubling cases in the 1990s. The violence perpetrated on handlers of the Shin Bet – the spearhead of Israeli intelligence – was a source of intense pride to Hamas and profound grief to the Shin Bet. The later doubling efforts, too, which showed that Hamas was capable of running HUMINT counterintelligence against Israel resulting in damage to Israeli operations and intelligence and certainly the killing of a soldier, were an important morale-raiser for the organization. As Muhammad Abu Harbid, an analyst on Hamas’s *al-Rasalla* website, wrote: “A war of intelligence between the occupation and the resistance is being fought, and there are messages being transmitted between the sides. The objective is to undermine the enemy’s trust in its agents in the Gaza Strip and show it the ability of the resistance to turn the agents into a trap for the enemy.”[[41]](#footnote-41)

The fifth dimension, related to morale, is the psychological success. The activity of any non-state entity in an asymmetric conflict is meant to wipe out the other side’s will to fight, while at the same time strengthening its own motivation (and that of the group to which it belongs) to persevere. In all its successful doubling operations, Hamas made sure to transform its operational/intelligence achievements into psychological victories. Hamas publicized these efforts in all the channels at its disposal and took steps to commemorate them in the context of the organization’s ethos and heritage.

Another major conclusion drawn from this survey of Hamas’s doubling operations is that the doubling efforts developed with each passing incident. This is evident at four key layers: the handler, the objective, the time frame, and the publication of success. The first doubling operations were limited, handled by local Hamas cells, but gradually more senior echelons became involved. The last one was directed by Hamas’s intelligence and security apparatus in an organized fashion. The objective, too, evolved: while the early attempts were aimed at localized actions against Shin Bet handlers, the efforts of the 2000s were planned as bait to draw IDF forces into ambushes. And the most recent case consisted of an ongoing deception aimed at damaging one of Israel’s most important efforts, namely destroying Hamas’s rockets.

Similarly, the operations grew concurrently longer: from a few days, to weeks and months, to two years in the last instance. The way the cases were publicized and used to cause a change in perception also developed. While the early operations were made public by posters and press releases, later on Hamas’s public affairs department in its Ministry of Interior released recorded statements and documentation of the preparations. In the last case, Hamas produced a well-planned, well-made movie clip, which was broadcast on an international network after a preliminary publicity campaign, and was meant to enhance the psychological victory.

**Conclusion**

Hamas has doubled agents on several occasions. In the 1990s, doubling operations were used to accomplish the short-term goal of killing the collaborators’ handlers. In the early 2000s, doubling operations became both longer-term, lasting from one to a few months, and more sophisticated, including goals such as providing false information. After Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, the Hamas governmental apparatus gradually imposed better organization on their efforts with collaborators, with their internal security forces, together with the Department of Military Intelligence, playing an important role. The doubling operations became increasingly organized and sophisticated, being used for propaganda and deterrence purposes as well as other goals.

This survey of the Hamas’s doubling operations against Israel demonstrates the great potential inherent in the doubling method as a tool for non-state actors – the weaker side – in the asymmetric war of intelligence they conduct against states. They can use this method to achieve both operational and intelligence successes that they would not have been able to obtain using regular HUMINT counterintelligence against the enemy, such as the apprehension and elimination of collaborators. They manage to do so using relatively few resources, from recruiting an agent at zero point to the agent becoming a high-quality HUMIINT source. Moreover, the case studies herein establish that doubling operations are an excellent platform for managing the battle over morale and public perception, both within the organization and the population from which it operates as well as within the enemy. In addition, the analysis of Hamas’s doubling efforts reveals the importance of being aware of this threat and its implications for intelligence and counterintelligence entities of states engaged in conflicts with terrorist organization and other violent non-state actors.

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2. John A. Gentry, “Toward a Theory of Non-State Actors' Intelligence,” *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 2016, pp. 465-469. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. David Strachan-Morris, “Developing theory on the use of intelligence by non-state actors: Five case studies on insurgent intelligence,” Intelligence and National Security, Vol. 34, No. 7, 2019, pp. 980-984. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Joshua Kilber, “Terrorist group structures: Balancing security and efficiency,” in Andrew Silke (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Terrorism and Counterterrorism,* London: Routledge, 2018, pp. 165-173. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Blake W. Mobley, *Terrorism and Counterintelligence: How Terrorist Groups Elude Detection*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, pp. 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Mark L. Reagan, *Terms & Definitions of Interest for Counterintelligence Professionals*, Department of Defense, 2014, p. 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For more on the various issues related to doubling agents, see: William R. Johnson & William Hood, *Thwarting enemies at home and abroad: How to be a counterintelligence officer,* Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009, pp.91-134. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Attributed to James M. Olson, Former Chief of CIA Counterintelligence, Reagan, *Terms & Definitions*, p. 122 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Mobley, *Terrorism and Counterintelligence*, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917–1948.* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008); Hillel Cohen, *Good Arabs: The Israeli Security Agencies and the Israeli Arabs, 1948–1967.* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For an attempt to characterize and categorize this activity in real time, see "Collaborators in the Occupied Territories: Human Rights Abuses and Violations," *B’Tselem,* January 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See more details bellow. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence and Coexistence*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 155-159; Tareq Baconi, *Hamas Contained: The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance,* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018, pp. 28-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Yaakov Perry, *Haba lehorgekha* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv: Keshet, 1999, pp. 34, 64-65, 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. “Collaborators in the Occupied Territories: Human Rights Abuses and Violations,” *B’Tselem,* January 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Mithaq Hamas*, Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya, 1988 (edition printed since 2004), p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. מילולית: תהילה, וגם ראשי תיבות של: מג'מועת אלג'האד ואלדעוה. Lit: "glory," as well as the initials of *majmu'at al-jihad wa-l-da'wa*, meaning "the jihad and preaching group." [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, p. 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Al-Shahidi al-Qassami/Maher Abu Srur, *Al-Qassam* website, no page. <https://alqassam.net/arabic/martyrs/details/1488>; Guy Aviad. *Lexicon Hamas* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv: Ma’arakhot Vemodan Publishers, 2014, pp. 47-48 [Hebrew]; Perry, *Haba*, p. 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Roni Shaqed, “Hunt for 3 terrorists who murdered Shin Bet officer” (Hebrew), *Yediot Aharonot*, February 14, 1994, p. 2; Perry, *Haba Lehorgekha*, pp. 235-236. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. “Al-Ḥalqa (1): Ṣa’ad al-shabak yakshif ‘an ‘amaliyat ightiyal Cohen” (Arabic), *Al-Qassam* website, October 30, 2011, <https://alqassam.net/arabic/news/details/3819>. Testimony submitted by Meir Ehrenfeld, Cohen’s bodyguard, who was with him in the car and was injured in the attack. Cited by Tziki Yishai, “Noam didn’t survive the ambush set for the Shin Bet” (Hebrew), *N12*, February 17, 2018,

    <https://www.mako.co.il/news-military/security-q2_2018/Article-4b8964014e4d261004.htm>; Aviad, *Lexicon*, pp. 36-37, 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. “Al-Ḥalqa (1): Ṣa’ad” ibid; “Bi-l-fidiyo ightiyal Cohen intisar li-l-qassam fi ṣira‘ al-admighha” (Arabic), *Al-Qassam* website, February 13, 2020, <https://alqassam.net/arabic/news/details/15826>; Perry, *Haba*, pp. 236-237. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. “Al-Ḥalqa (2): Al-mujahidun yunaffidhun al-khutta wa-yaghtalu ḍabit al-shabak” (Arabic), *Al-Qassam* website, November 2011, <https://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/news1.php?id=24619>; “Al-Ḥalqa (3): Istishihad wa-‘iqtiyal ba‘ad iṣṭayyid ḍabit al-shabak” (Arabic), *Al-Qassam* website, November 10, 2011, <https://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/news/details/3883>. A summary of the recording is provided by Tzvi Zinger and David Regev “Hamas member confesses: I killed the Shin Bet officer” (Hebrew), *Yedito Aharonot*, February 16, 1993, p. 7; Tzvi Zinger and Roni Shaqed, “Hamas agent leads Shin Bet officers into ambush” (Hebrew), *Yediot Aharonot*, February 15, 1994, p. 1; Shaqed, “Hunt,” p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. “Al-Ḥalqa (3): Istishihad,” ibid, <https://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/news/details/3883>; Aviad. *Lexicon*, pp. 36-37, 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Baconi, *Hamas Contained*, pp. 36-99; Jonathan Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah: The Struggle for Palestine*, New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008, pp. 57-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. For more, see the unusually far-reaching Israeli verdict that recounts PA abuses against some 60 people suspected of collaborating with Israel: Civil File (Jerusalem District Court) 5074-03, A.G. and 17 others v. the Palestinian Authority, April 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See, e.g.: Appeal 5340/08, Saleh Ahmad Saleh Sheikh v. the Military Prosecution, December 29, 2008; High Court of Justice 05/11199, Anonymous v. the Military Commander of the Judea and Samaria Region, January 1, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. “Al-maktab al-i‘lami li-kata’ib al-qassam, ‘ibda‘at qassamiyya’” (Arabic), *Ḥumat al-thughur*, Adad 1, December 20, 2004, pp. 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. “‘Amaliyyat al-sahm al-thaqib al-amniyya” (Arabic), *Al-Qassam* website, undated. To view the preparations for the operation, the digging of the tunnel, and the planting of the explosives, see the movie clip *‘Amaliyyat al-sahm al-thaqib*, *Al-Qassam* website, May 25, 2008. For details of the action as they emerged during a Hamas press conference and the declaration it issued after the action, see: “Mutamar al-sahm al-thaqib” (Arabic), *Al-Qassam* website, May 27, 2008; “Kata’ib tantaṣiru ‘ala mukhabarat al-ṣahyuniyya fi ‘amaliyyat al-sahm al-thaqib al-amniyya al-mu‘aqqada wa-ma khafi kan ’aẓam” (Arabic), *Al-Qassam* website, December 7, 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The name of the source was never made public and remains classified. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Various Criminal Requests 686/09, State of Israel v. Anonymous, March 1, 2009, pp. 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah*, pp. 120-107; Baconi, *Hamas Contained*, pp. 133-170. Benedetta Berti, "Non-State Actors as Providers of Governance: The Hamas Government in Gaza between Effective Sovereignty, Centralized Authority, and Resistance," *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 69, No. 1, 2015, pp. 9-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. *Al-watha’iqi sarab ḍarba ’amniyya li-qiyyadat al-iḥtilal ‘ala yad kata’ib al-qassam*,” Al-Mayadin, initially broadcast on December 18, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyRoP1tZ5QQ>, 1:08-2:52. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid, 2:53-3:57. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid, 3:57-7:43. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid, 7:44-16:35. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid, 17:38-19:00, 22:45-25:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. For more on the stages of identifying agents in the recruitment cycle, see: Reagan, *Terms & Definitions*, p. 271-272. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *Al-Rasalla*, December 19, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)