**introduction**

Throughout history, intelligence has been a crucial and fascinating component of conflicts, in which the contending parties battle with their wits, using secrets and stratagems. Intelligence is an important aspect of any organization that uses military force to meet its needs and is part of the essential infrastructure for the success of its operations.

*The Hamas Intelligence War against Israel* tells the story of the intelligence dimension of Hamas’s struggle against Israel from its inception to the present. Since it was founded in 1987, Hamas has been in conflict with Israel and has needed information on its adversary to conduct successful operations and to manage its activity wisely. As Hamas developed and its institutions became more established, this activity gradually became more organized and sophisticated.

The main aim of this book is to describe and analyse the evolution of Hamas’s intelligence warfare against Israel. This includes how Hamas gathered information using a variety of methods, the way it used this information for operational needs and strategic analysis, and Hamas’s counterintelligence activity against the Israeli intelligence apparatus. The framework of the manuscript is historical, addressing the different types of intelligence in turn. It discusses how intelligence and counterintelligence warfare is an integral element of Hamas’s development since its inception, covering the entire scope of the struggle between Hamas and Israel. בכך, ספר זה הוא החיבור הראשון באורך מלא אשר מנתח, בין היתר על בסיס מקורות ראשוניים רבים, פעילות מודיעינית של ארגון לא מדינתי אלים, במבט רב תחומי ולאורך כל שנות קיומו של הארגון.

חמאס הוקם בשנת 1987. בשנה זו פרצה האנתפאצ'ה הראשונה ברחבי יהודה, שומרון ועזה, אשר כללה לחימה עזה בין המוני העם הפלסטינים לבין כוחות צה"ל. במקביל, כינס שיח' אחמד יאסין, אשר היה ידוע עד אז כמנהיג דתי וחברתי המפעיל רשת דעוה ענפה, כמה ממקורביו והכריז על הקמת תנועת התנגדות חדשה, חמאס. חמאס ינק את שורשיו האידיאולוגיים מתנועת "האחים המסלמים", כפי שהדבר מתבטא באמנת הארגון שפורסה בשנת 1988. במהלך האנתפאצ'ה, החל חמאס בהדרגה לקרוא תיגר על שליטתו של פת"ח ברחוב הפלסטיני וצבר בהדרגה אהדה בקרב האוכלוסייה ברצועת עזה ובגדה המערבית.[[1]](#footnote-1)

גם במהלך המגעים לחתימת הסכם אוסלו (1993) ולאחריו, המשיכו פעילי חמאס להתנער מקשר עם הגורמים הישראליים, הכובשים לטענתם, ולדבוק בדרך הג'האד. במהלך שנות התשעים, ניהלו חמאס ומדינת ישראל מערכה מתמשכת במסגרתה ביצעו פעילי חמאס פיגועי טרור רבים וקשים בתוך שטחי ישראל, ובמקביל פעלו כוחות צה"ל והשב"כ למעצר ולפעילות סיכול ממוקד של פעילי הארגון. בשנת 2000, פרצה האנתפאצ'ה השנייה, במסגרתה היה החמאס לגוף מוביל בביצוע פעולות הטרור מול מדינת ישראל. בתגובה, פעל צה"ל החל משנת 2002 באופן קשה מול פעילי הטרור של חמאס (החל ממבצע "חומת מגן"), ובמקביל חיסלה מדינת ישראל את מרבית הנהגת חמאס (לרבות שיח' יאסין עצמו בשנת 2004) באופן שפגע משמעותית בפעילותו.[[2]](#footnote-2)

עקב הפגיעה בשדרת ההנהגה, ובמקביל להכרזת מדינת ישראל על תכנית ה"התנתקות" מרצועת עזה (אשר בוצעה הלכה למעשה בקיץ 2005), החל חמאס להגביר את כוחו במישור הפוליטי, תך שהוא צובר כוח רב בקרב הציבור הפלסטיני. חמאס השתלט על חלק ניכר מהשטחים שפונו על ידי צה"ל, והזרוע הצבאית שלו החלה בתהליך של מיסוד, לרבות בתחום המודיעין אשר הפך בהדרגה לחלק אינטגרלי מהמאמץ הצבאי. בינואר 2006, ניצח חמאס בבחירות לפרלמנט הרשות הפלסטינית ובכך הפך, לראשונה, לגורם השולט בשטחי הרשות הפלסטינית. עם זאת, מאבקים פנים פלסטיניים בינו לבין תנועת הפת"ח הביאו לקרב על השלטון, ובסופו של דבר, נלקח השלטון ברצועת עזה על ידי חמאס בכוח הזרוע ביוני 2007, וחמאס הפך להיות השליט דה-פקטו בכל שטחי הרצועה. כפועל יוצא, נפרסו כוחות חמאס על הגבול עם ישראל תוך חיזוק הזרוע הצבאית לכדי גוף צבאי מאורגן ומסודר.[[3]](#footnote-3)

מאז עלה לשלטון ברצועת עזה, ידע הקונפליקט בין ישראל לחמאס תקופות רגועות יותר וגורועת פחות, כאשר אחת לכמה שנים התפרץ אירוע לחימה משמעותי ורחבי היקף בין הצדדים (הרבעה העיקריים הם "עופרת יצוקה" בשנת 2008, "עמוד ענן" בשנת 2012, "צוק איתן" בשנת 2014, "שומר החומות" בשנת 2021). אירועי לחימה אלו הביאו לידי ביטוי את המערכה הא-סימטרית בין הצדדים, בה כל אחד ביקש להביא לידי ביטוי את יתרונותיו, תוך ניסיון לפגוע ביריב בנקודות החולשה שלו, גם בשדה הקרב וגם במאמצים "רכים יותר" כמו לוחמה פסיכולוגית ודיפלומטיה.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Generally, it can be said that since its foundation of Hamas in 1987 until the mid-2000, Hamas’s operational efforts were tactical in nature, based on local cells and infrastructure, and focused on terror attacks on Israeli civilians and security forces. After Israel’s disengagement from the Gaza Strip, when Israel ceased to have both a military and a civilian presence in this territory, Hamas began to grow and become institutionalized. The military wing, ‘Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, developed a hierarchical structure and became more professional. After Hamas came to power *de-facto* in June 2007 (after winning the January 2006 elections *de-jure*) this process became more significant, with Hamas’s governmental apparatus becoming involved in the resistance against Israel. As it will be shown in the book, the intelligence development of Hamas has been going hand in hand with the organization's evolution.

Most of the research literature on Hamas focuses on the ideological and political aspects of its activity. Nevertheless, some scholars have studied Hamas as a military organization and a fighting force. Some examples include Khaled Hroub’s *Hamas: A Beginner’s Guide* (London, Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006) which devotes a chapter to Hamas’s resistance and military strategy until the middle of the 2000’s, especially addressing suicide attacks. The third chapter of Zaki Chehab’s *Inside Hamas: The Untold Story of Militants, Martyrs and Spies* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007) describes the development of Hamas’s military wing. The seventh chapter of Jennifer Jefferis’s *Hamas: Terrorism, Governance, and Its Future in Middle East Politics* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2016) deals with Hamas as military organization, including its origins, structure, and its activities during the periods of combat in Gaza.

Other books address the military components of Hamas as part of the general story of its evolution, such as Tareq Baconi’s *Hamas Contained: The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), Azzam Tamimi’s *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters* (London: Hurst and company, 2009) and Sahul Mishal and Avraham Sela’s *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). In these books, Hamas’s military operations, capabilities and strategy are analysed as part of the holistic analysis of the organization’s story.

Several articles published in academic journals or by research centres address either Hamas as a military force. For example, Yoram Cohen and Jeffrey White’s[[5]](#footnote-5) research gives a broad picture of Hamas’s military capabilities and activity. Articles by Omer Dostri and Kobi Michael[[6]](#footnote-6) and by Guy Aviad[[7]](#footnote-7) describe Hamas’s military development in general. A number of other articles address specific military aspects of Hamas: an article by Nicole J. Watkins and Alena M. James[[8]](#footnote-8) explores Hamas’s tunnel-digging efforts; Aviad Mendelboim and Liran Antebi’s[[9]](#footnote-9) article relates to Hamas’s use of technology; Lian Zucker and Edward H. Kaplan’s[[10]](#footnote-10) article addresses Hamas’s rocket capabilities and their potential and actual damage. Other articles deal with the broader effects of Hamas’s military activities, such as Minna Saarnivaara’s[[11]](#footnote-11) article on the repercussions of Hamas’s suicide campaigns and Somdeep Sen’s article that explores the way Hamas’s military activity is perceived by the Palestinians.[[12]](#footnote-12)As we can see,, the conflict between Hamas and Israel has never been studied from the intelligence perspective.

In addition, and this research is pioneering in the fields of intelligence studies, and the study of political violence and terrorism.  The study of the intelligence efforts of violent non-state actors is a significant lacuna in these areas of academic discourse. Most political and historical research tends to focus on intelligence operations by states rather than by non-state actors.

Indeed, some short articles on the intelligence of non-state actors have been published in the last decade, to the best of my knowledge, only one of these articles deals with Hamas, and that only partially. The only book that is at all related to the proposed book’s topic is Blake W. Mobley’s *Terrorism and Counterintelligence: How Terrorist Groups Elude Detection* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2012), which tries to create a theoretical framework for the counterintelligence methods being used by terrorist groups. This book doesn’t deal with Hamas at all. The proposed book will be the first full-length monograph that addresses the intelligence and counterintelligence of a non-state actor and thus will contribute not only to historical research but also to the development of a theoretical framework for this important topic.

As the book reveals, intelligence pertained to the entire range of Hamas’s activity: decision-making, perceptions, and assessment of the conflict, military operations, organizational structure, technological development, and more. For this reason, analysing the history of the conflict from the intelligence perspective reveals new and fascinating insights. The book addresses the entire scope of intelligence activity, from low-tech observation outposts to gathering information from the Israeli media, to sophisticated cyberwarfare and double agents. This yields a unique point of view of Hamas’s advancement over the years.

The book is based on a research using Arabic, Hebrew, and English sources. These include many primary sources from within Hamas that have never before been published, as well as primary sources from the Israeli side, including official documents and evidence and first-hand confessions from legal proceedings conducted in Israel, which contain important information about intelligence activity. This wide range of sources allows me to paint a broad and original portrait of the intelligence and counterintelligence activities of Hamas.

The book includes seven chapters, each one dedicaded to one intelligence discipline, revealing Hamas's activitiy within it in a chronological order. The first four chapters explores Hamas's main disciplines of intelligence collection. The first Chapter deals with Hamas's Geospatial and Imagery Intelligence (GEOINT). This chapter describes how Hamas operatives set up tactical observation posts during the first intifadha, the years after the Oslo Accord, and the second intifadha. It explores how after Israel’s withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, this activity became well organized and systematic, eventually establishing the ‘Morabiton,’ a border patrol force that mans observation posts and is the first responder to any Israeli incursion, as well as an observation section as part of ‘Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, the Hamas Military Wing. The members of this section used more advanced equipment than before and documented their findings to enable in-depth analysis. This chapter also describes Hamas’s efforts to develop and operate Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for observation missions.

The second chapter deals with Hamas's Human Intelligence (HUMINT) activity. Hamas obviously makes use of the most traditional method of gathering intelligence – getting information from human sources. This chapter details how Hamas initially recruited mainly local sources for short periods and specific missions. Gradually, sources were recruited who could operate outside of Israel, and these were sent on more long-term and advanced missions. Hamas also used the internet, i.e. social media, and emails, to contact potential sources and even to manage them. This chapter will also describe how Hamas turned collaborators with Israel into double agents and ran operations with them.

The third chapter explores Hamas's Open-source intelligence (OSINT), which is readily available and inexpensive. Hamas collected a lot of information from open sources, mainly the Israeli press. In this case, Hamas exploited the fact that Israel is a democratic state with a relatively free press to get valuable information for its operations. This sort of collection activity became more organized after Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip and was Hamas’s main source for strategic analysis. This chapter describes the intelligence content Hamas gathered from open sources and that content’s contribution to its activities.

The forth chapter sheds light on Hamas's signal intelligence (SIGINT) and cyberwarfare. It describes how in the first decade of the 2000’s, Hamas gained some signal intelligence capabilities. These made it possible for Hamas to intercept the camera broadcasts of Israel Defense Forces (IDF) UAVs as well as the IDF’s visible tactical communication traffic. In the 2010’s Hamas began investing in cyberwarfare. This chapter surveys how Hamas, using several hacking methods, successfully penetrated the smartphones of IDF soldiers and officers, both extracting information from them and installing spyware; this chapter includes the description of some actual cases for illustration.After addressing Hamas’s intelligence collection in previous chapters, the fifth chapter will focus on Hamas’s counterintelligence efforts to thwart Israeli intelligence efforts against it. To overcome Israel’s attempts to infiltrate its ranks, Hamas went to great lengths to screen those wishing to join it, while diligently acting to detect collaborators with Israel, both within its ranks and in the broader society in which they operate, while applying internal compartmentalization to the organization. To counter Israel’s SIGINT activity, Hamas tried to avoid the use of wireless communications, and also made use of encryption, both in telephone communication and in correspondence; over time, Hamas developed an internal communication system that is separate from the public system.

To defeat Israel’s GEOINT efforts, Hamas tried to conceal its activities to the greatest extent possible. This included a range of strategies, including camouflage, the assimilation of military installations in civilian surroundings, and the use of subterranean spaces. Regarding open-source media publications, Hamas developed the awareness of the need to impose censorship to hide certain characteristic signs of their activity. This is evident from the comparison of foreign media coverage with Hamas’s own media releases.

The sixth chapter will analyse how Hamas used intelligence to conduct successful operations against Israel. The combination of intelligence gathering and clandestine activities, as described in the previous chapters, led to several high-quality operations against Israel. For example, in an attack in 2006, Hamas successfully abducted IDF soldier Gilad Shalit and was able to keep him hidden for years, despite Israel’s efforts to find and rescue him in the tiny Gaza Strip. In addition, Hamas created a “bank” of targets through its intelligence-gathering efforts. This structured list of vulnerable quality targets was used to focus rocket attacks against Israel and find locations for suicide attacks.

The seventh chapter explores Hamas's Strategic Analysis and Studying Israel and the IDF. As part of its intelligence warfare, Hamas exerted efforts to increase its knowledge of its enemy. This chapter will describe how Hamas gathered information about Israeli weaponry, IDF units, Israeli battlefield tactics, operational training, etc. Special emphasis was placed on collecting information about the capabilities of Israeli armor in order to inform their use of antitank weaponry. The chapter will also illustrate how Hamas disseminated this knowledge in its ranks.

This chapter also analizes how after Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip, Hamas began to be operationally prepared for war and made an ongoing assessment of the option of a large-scale Israeli attack and its characteristics. This chapter will also focus on Hamas’s analysis of the Israeli political and social situation as a basis for assessing the possibility of Israel launching a large-scale military action in the Gaza Strip. In this manner, The chapter discusses the optional influence of Hamas’s ‘enemy image’ of Israel, an image that is based upon the organization’s Palestinian Islamic ideology as well as its interpretation of events and social processes in Israel, on the organiztion's assessment of Israel.

It will also shed light on the organization’s weakness in obtaining inside information of Israeli decision-making processes. For this reason, the assessment of Israel’s future moves was mainly based on OSINT, the analysis of past cases, and situation assessments. This led to several blunders, such as the failure to anticipate that Israel would respond as forcefully as it did in Operation Cast Lead (December 2008-January 2009), or to foresee its decision to assassinate Ahmad al-Ja’abari at the beginning of Operation Pillar of Defense (November 2012).

The conclusions section sums up the contribution of Hamas’s intelligence to the organization’s activities associated with its struggle against Israel. It details the strengths and weaknesses of the organization’s efforts to gather intelligence on Israel, counter Israeli intelligence activity towards it, and assess Israel’s intentions and capabilities. this section, also examines the lessons from the study of the case of Hamas with regard to intelligence warfare by violent non-state actors in general.

# לסיום, מספר הערות טכניות. לאורך הספר, ביטויים ושמות תועתקו על פי כללי התעתיק מעברית וערבית לאנגלית, ללא סימנים דיאקריטיים – הן בגוף הטקסט והן בהפניה למקורות המופיעה בהערות השוליים ובביבליוגרפיה. בנוסף, שמות של אנשים הוזכרו בפעם הראשונה בשמם המלא ולאחר מכן בשם משפחה, חוץ ממקרים בהם באותה פעילות השתתפו שני אנשי חמאס בעלי אותו שם משפחה (לרוב אחים), או אז הם יכונו בשמם פרטי בכדי להבדיל ביניהם.

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3. 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-3)
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