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Cognitive Warfare in the Gaza Strip and West Bank Conflict (2025)



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Abstract:

This article analyzes the cognitive war between Israel and Hamas following the October 7, 2023 attack, in which the informational domain became a key battlefield. Both actors have deployed strategic narratives through social media, digital platforms, and traditional outlets to influence the perceptions and behaviors of local and international audiences. Israel adopts a defensive communication strategy based on official sources, high technical quality, and content primarily directed at Western audiences. Hamas, in contrast, uses an emotional and decentralized approach focused on victimization and global mobilization. The struggle to control the narrative has led to increased polarization, weakened trust in traditional media, and reinforced extreme positions. The article concludes that cognitive warfare prolongs the conflict and underscores the need to build a robust and resilient national information capability, able to effectively counter disinformation and manipulation operations within the digital sphere.

Keywords:

Israel, Hamas, Cognitive Warfare, Social Media.

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Introduction

Just as World War I (1914–1918) introduced the widespread use of military aviation and World War II (1939–1945) solidified the use of aircraft carriers in naval warfare, contemporary conflicts have shaped the information environment. This incorporation helps both to achieve one's own military objectives and to hinder the adversary's decision-making processes.

Military operations no longer take place solely in the traditional domains—land, sea, and airspace—but also, as in the case of hybrid warfare or conflict in the gray zone[1], in non-physical domains such as the cognitive domain and cyberspace. The cognitive domain is where individuals and groups form their opinions, experience emotions, and act in relation to specific issues.

On October 7, 2023—hereafter referred to as 7O—the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, carried out an indiscriminate attack on Israeli territory, coinciding with the day after the commemoration of the victory in the Yom Kippur War (1973). The outcome of this terrorist attack was approximately 1,200 people killed, including both civilians and military personnel, as well as 251 individuals kidnapped, sparking an international wave of outrage and polarization[2].

Israeli intelligence identified the leader of Hamas, the Palestinian Yahya Sinwar (1962–2024), as the main ideologue behind the events of 7O, although the operative execution was carried out by Mohamed Deif (1965–2024). Sinwar spent 22 years in prison and had received four life sentences. He spoke fluent Hebrew and had a deep understanding of Israeli idiosyncrasies, including its aspirations, fears, and vulnerabilities. Sinwar was released in 2011 as part of a prisoner exchange in which more than a thousand Palestinians were freed in return for a single Israeli soldier: Corporal Gilad Shalit[3].

The confidence stemming from his release, the radicalization process during his imprisonment, and his understanding of Hebrew society enabled the Palestinian to plan

[1] MINISTERIO DE DEFENSA. (2023). PDC-01 (B): Doctrina para el empleo de las Fuerzas Armadas. Estado Mayor de la Defensa. https://www.emad.mde.es
[2] In Social Psychology, polarization refers to the phenomenon whereby groups ultimately adopt more extreme positions than those initially held by some of their members, once those positions have been embraced as the majority view.
[3] BBC NEWS MUNDO (17 de octubre de 2011). *Mil prisioneros palestinos por un soldado israelí, las claves del intercambio*. https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2011/10/111017_soldado_shalit_palestinos_israel_claves_rg

a blow that is difficult for Israeli society to process and that will have unpredictable consequences for the region.

In that prisoner exchange, Israel revealed a significant vulnerability to its enemies. Hamas could not defeat Israel on the battlefield, but if Israel was willing to trade 1,000 prisoners for a single soldier, then hostages held considerable value in any potential negotiation with Israel. This formula appears to remain effective today.

This past May 2025, the Israeli government announced on X (formerly Twitter) the release of Israeli-American soldier Edan Alexander by Hamas as a gesture of "goodwill" upon the arrival of Donald Trump in the region[4].

From that moment on, the media and social networks were flooded with images and videos supporting both sides of the conflict, and a massive exchange of disinformation[5], misinformation[6], malicious content[7], foreign interference, and information manipulation took place, along with well-planned influence campaigns and information operations[8].

The people of Israel continue to be retraumatized[9] by the accounts and memories of survivors and by the remembrance of those who did not return home. Moreover, videos and images from that day remain available on social media and are repeatedly shared through platforms such as X, Meta (Facebook, Instagram), TikTok, and Telegram.

The fate of the Palestinian people is highly unequal, and they are indiscriminate targets of actions by both Israel and Hamas. Images of a devastated territory, along with fear of the consequences of a powerful army's actions and the narrative promoted by Hamas of a new exodus or Nakba[10] in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, have fostered a sense of learned helplessness among the Palestinian population. This serves to sideline their right

[4] BBC NEWS MUNDO. (12 de mayo de 2025). *Hamás libera a un rehén israelí-estadounidense en un gesto de buena voluntad ante la visita de Trump a Medio Oriente*. BBC. https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articles/cvg74kd7ggzo
[5] NATO defines disinformation as the deliberate creation and dissemination of false or manipulated information with the intent to deceive and confuse. It is a form of information warfare, frequently used by state or non-state actors to manipulate public opinion, undermine trust, and destabilize societies. NATO's approach focuses on countering these informational threats, including disinformation, information manipulation, and interference by foreign actors.
[6] Real information, but used out of context (for example, the downing of an aircraft in a video game presented as real and attributed to a specific scenario).
[7] False information that is transmitted, but without the intent to deceive.
[8] Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) and Strategic Communication (STRATCOM).
[9] Retraumatization is a state composed of reactions, responses, and symptoms of traumatic stress that occur as a result of multiple exposures to traumatic events of a physical, psychological, or combined nature.
[10]The Palestinian exodus as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war fuels the idea of being a stateless people, and therefore, destined to cease to exist.

to self-determination and diminish the possibility of acting in accordance with their own legitimate interests[11].

The growing recognition of the power of this domain to influence other operational domains, the solid body of knowledge on persuasion and social influence, and the appeal of the cyber domain—the main transmission vector of the cognitive domain—have all contributed to acknowledging its importance. As a result, it is now appropriate to speak of an exchange of information that constitutes a true cognitive war, which must be contextualized within this conflict.

Cognitive warfare

Cognitive warfare refers to a set of planned actions that, in coordination with other instruments of power, aim to influence the attitudes and behaviors of target audiences. The desired outcome in this domain is to achieve cognitive superiority over the adversary[12].

This supremacy translates, first, into having the ability to continuously scan the information environment (i.e., the ability to observe); second, into being able to plan and orient toward the most likely courses of action (i.e., orientation); third, into being able to immediately decide on the measures to take (i.e., decision); and finally, into having the actual capacity to carry them out (i.e., action). Ultimately, it is about answering the questions: What is happening in the information environment? What is drawing the most attention? What response options do I have? And finally, can I carry them out?

Israeli intelligence agencies consistently denounce information that supports Hamas's narrative, which is considered by both the EU[13] and the United States[14] as a terrorist organization[15]. Although the terrorist organization cannot have official access to social

[11] A human response described in 1967 by J. B. Overmier and M. E. P. Seligman, which explains how individuals learn that they lack behavioral control over environmental events. This, in turn, undermines their motivation to make changes or attempt to alter situations, and is accompanied by motivational, associative (i.e., learning), and emotional deficits (APA, 2025).
[12] ALLIED COMMAND TRANSFORMATION. (2025). NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept. Recuperado el 16 de junio de 2025, de https://www.act.nato.int/our-work/nato-warfighting-capstone-concept/ en.wikipedia.org+14act.nato.int+14act.nato.int+14
[13] CONSEJO DE LA UNIÓN EUROPEA. (2025, 5 de mayo). Sanciones contra el terrorismo: Hamás y la Yihad Islámica Palestina. Accedido el 5 de mayo de 2025 de https://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/policies/sanctions-against-terrorism/#hamasPublicación de la Unión Europea+5Consejo Europeo+5Consejo Europeo+5
[14] U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE. (n.d.). Foreign terrorist organizations. U.S. Department of State. Accedido el 5 de mayo de 2025 de https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/
[15] RTVE.ES. (2025, 18 de mayo). Israel en Eurovisión: participación con polémica y victoria en el televoto. RTVE. Recuperado de https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20250518/israel-eurovision-participacion-polemica-victoria-televoto/16585642.shtml

media platforms, it has realized that it can bypass these restrictions through proxies[16] and sympathizers with the Palestinian people, thus achieving the desired presence on social networks.

Israel considers it a priority to focus on legitimizing its defense, while Hamas sees it as essential to spread the idea of devastation and the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and the West Bank, which it shows no intention of halting. Social media platforms are currently under immense pressure, and many of them have made genuine efforts to regulate disinformation[17]and provide explanations[18]. The EU[19] has even demanded explanations from these platforms, arguing that some of the content circulating on social media may violate the European Digital Services Act[20].

Israel and Hamas maintain intense activity on social media, where they carry out numerous offensive and defensive actions within the information domain in an effort to take the initiative. Following the attacks perpetrated on October 7, 2023, Israel responded immediately by disseminating audiovisual content showing both the attacks suffered and their psychological aftermath. Some of these videos reached millions of views, demonstrating the Israeli state's ability to position its narrative within the digital ecosystem.

A relevant example of this communication strategy occurred when Israel was accused of bombing the Al-Ahli Hospital[21], located in the northern Gaza Strip. In response to the accusation, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) immediately launched a social media campaign that included technical impact analyses, aerial images of the facility, audio

[16] Entities, organizations, or individuals within a state that act in the interest of a foreign actor.
[17] TIKTOK. (2023, 16 de octubre). *Nuestras acciones continuas para proteger a la comunidad de TikTok durante la guerra entre Israel y Hamás*. Sala de prensa de TikTok. https://newsroom.tiktok.com/es-latam/nuestras-acciones-continuas-para-proteger-a-la-comunidad-de-tiktok-durante-la-guerra-entre-israel-y-hamas
[18] META. (13 de octubre de 2023). *Meta's ongoing efforts regarding the Israel-Hamas war* [Los esfuerzos continuos de Meta respecto a la guerra entre Israel y Hamás]. About Meta. https://about.fb.com/news/2023/10/metas-efforts-regarding-israel-hamas-war/
[19] RTVE.ES / Agencias. (2023, 11 de octubre de 2023). *La UE pide a Elon Musk que regule la desinformación y el "contenido violento" en la red social X tras los ataques de Hamás*. RTVE. https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20231011/union-europea-ue-pide-elon-musk-regule-contenido-violento-twitter-tras-ataques-hamas/2458128.shtml
[20] COMISIÓN EUROPEA. (2023). *El acto de servicios digitales*. Comisión Europea. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act_es
[21] ABUALOUF, R. (13 de abril de 2025). *Israeli air strike destroys part of last fully functional hospital in Gaza City*. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjr7l123zy5oBBC

recordings, and explanatory videos aimed at absolving Israel of responsibility and attributing the attack to Hamas[22].

For its part, Hamas has also demonstrated knowledge and operational capacity in the cognitive domain. During the October 7 offensive, it spread false information, including the alleged capture of Israeli General Nimrod Aloni[23]—an event that was later debunked by various sources[24]. Likewise, Hamas has shown the ability to respond to the adversary's information operations, as evidenced by its denial of the alleged expulsion of its delegation from Qatar—a key actor in the indirect communication channels with Israel aimed at seeking a potential ceasefire in Gaza[25].

Israel is the target of countless information campaigns in both traditional media and social networks. It must plan, with a certain degree of caution, the impact of its military operations and how these will be received by the media. Hamas's propaganda and the massive reactions on social media are embedded in each of Israel's military actions, and through this, Hamas demonstrates its ability to influence and delay Israel's[26]decision-making process.

Israel, for its part, shows a deliberate and careful selection of content, choosing its narratives with precision and based on objective information. In contrast, it is more difficult for Israel to interrupt Hamas's decision-making cycle, as it is decentralized and carried out by multiple actors. Hamas publishes reactive, subjective content in response to Israeli military actions. Even though Hamas does not have a publicly known communication policy, that does not mean one does not exist or that it is ineffective.

Narratives are the oral, written, or audiovisual account of events and information arranged in a logical sequence to influence the behavior of a target audience (NATO, 2025). Cyberspace has become saturated with products (e.g., videos, images…) that convey

[22] ABC. (2023, 18 de octubre). *Incógnitas en el ataque al hospital Ahli de Gaza: Más de 500 muertos*. ABC. https://www.abc.es/internacional/incoginas-ataque-hospital-ahli-gaza-muerto-500-20231018092647-nt.html
[23] ARAB INTELLIGENCE [@Arab_Intel]. (7 de octubre de 2023). *Le général israelien Nimrod Aloni a été capturé par le #Hamas*. [Post]. X. Vista: https://x.com/arab_intel/status/1710610452659515412
[24] GOLDIN, M. (9 de octubre de 2023). *A top Israeli general was not kidnapped by Hamas, contrary to widespread online claim*. Associated Press News. https://apnews.com/article/fact-check-nimrod-aloni-israel-hamas-gaza-captured-493462949098
[25] EUROPA PRESS INTERNACIONAL. (2024, 9 de noviembre). *Hamás desmiente que Qatar vaya a expulsar a su delegación del país*. Europa Press. https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-hamas-desmiente-qatar-vaya-expulsar-delegacion-pais-20241109154223.html
[26] ALANDETE, D. (2024, 15 de mayo). *La ONU seguirá usando las cifras de Hamás pese a corregir errores*. ABC. https://www.abc.es/internacional/onu-seguira-usando-cifras-hamas-pese-corregir-20240514200009-nt.html

the carefully selected narratives of both sides of the conflict, and these are consumed daily by millions of people[27]. These narratives, which may appear spontaneous at first glance, can be broken down into elements that have been logically combined in such a way that they form a unique and distinct story for each actor.

The objective of a narrative is to influence a selected target audience among many. To achieve this, one must: choose a credible source of information from those available, craft persuasive content[28] that reaches the chosen audiences, determine the most effective method of information transmission, and anticipate results stemming from its publication.

Until now, lines of persuasion were easy to identify, and there was a solid body of literature on the subject[29,30]. However, the emergence of new technologies, combined with society's preference for a world driven by images and social media, has made societies highly vulnerable to influence. Ultimately, cyberspace is filled with carefully crafted products from both sides that employ modern means of persuasion—and, ultimately, of influence[31].

Until recently, lines of persuasion were easy to identify, and there was a strong body of literature on the subject[32,33]. However, the emergence of new technologies, along with society's preference for a world driven by images and social media, has made societies highly vulnerable to influence. Ultimately, cyberspace is filled with carefully crafted products from both sides, employing modern tools of persuasion—and, ultimately, influence[34].

In the context of cognitive warfare—and also in other forms of contemporary confrontation—the analysis of the narratives deployed by the actors in conflict must take into account a fundamental distinction: addressing offensive strategies is not the same

[27] WEIMANN, G., y WEIMANN-SAKS, D. (2024). Coping with Hamas's Psychological Warfare during the Gaza War. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2024.2327669
[28] Persuasion is an active [deliberate] attempt to change another person's attitudes, beliefs, or emotions regarding a particular topic, person, concept, or object (APA, 2025).
[29] CIALDINI, R. B. (2001). *Influence: Science and practice* (4.ª ed.). Allyn and Bacon.
[30] CIALDINI, R. B. (2016). *Pre-suasion: A revolutionary way to influence and persuade*. Simon & Schuster.
[31] Influence refers to the ability to affect thinking, behavior, and emotions in an indirect and subtle manner. There are two forms of influence: normative and informational.
[32] CIALDINI, R. B. (2001). *Influence: Science and practice* (4.ª ed.). Allyn and Bacon.
[33] CIALDINI, R. B. (2016). *Pre-suasion: A revolutionary way to influence and persuade*. Simon & Schuster.
[34] Influence refers to the ability to affect thinking, behavior, and emotions in an indirect and subtle manner. There are two forms of influence: normative and informational.

as addressing defensive ones. This difference is not only methodological but also reveals differing intentions, resources, and frameworks.

Although each side upholds its own vision of the conflict, both employ offensive and defensive cognitive warfare tactics[35]. This article chooses to focus on the analysis of defensive strategies—those aimed at protecting a population or narrative structure from the opponent's narrative attacks. However, this does not mean that offensive actions are overlooked. Wherever their study contributes to a better understanding of the logic of the conflict, they will be considered as part of the analysis. It is understood that limiting the scope to only one dimension of cognitive warfare would be a methodological error.

Israel's strategy

The main sources of information for the Israeli narrative are the IDF[36], Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu[37] (born October 21, 1949) [38], and the Israeli[39] government itself. In addition, Israel's international diplomatic network is used as a source for the development and dissemination of pro-Israeli information. These actors communicate carefully crafted messages, likely coordinated by organizations such as the Israel Security Agency (ISA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Security Directorate (NSD), or the government itself.

The source appears to demonstrate a high level of morale and resilience, consistent with *Hasbará*—the term used by the State of Israel to promote Israel's image, explain government policies, and prevent demoralization by encouraging the Jewish[40]. people. For political and military analysts, the information released by the Israeli state is generally considered reliable, as it comes from official, easily identifiable sources and conveys truthful information.

[35] SCHWEITZER, Y., y SIMAN-TOV, D. (29 de mayo de 2022). *The cognitive war between Israel and Hamas: Implications and recommendations* (No. 1601). Institute for National Security Studies. https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep42560

[36] ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES [@IDF]. (s.f.). *Posts* [perfil de X]. X. Recuperado el 27 de mayo de 2025, de https://x.com/@IDF.

[37] BENJAMIN NETANYAGU [@netanyahu]. (s.f). *Posts* [perfil de X]. X. Recuperado el 27 de mayo de 2025 de https://x.com/@netanyahu.

[38] EL ORDEN MUNDIAL. (27 julio de 2024). *Netanyahu, el hombre fuerte de Israel* [Audio podcast episodio]. En *No es el fin del mundo*. The Voice Village. https://elordenmundial.com/podcasts/no-es-el-fin-del-mundo/netanyahu-hombre-fuerte-israel/

[39] ISRAEL [@Israel]. (s.f.). *Posts* [perfil de X]. X. Recuperado el 27 de mayo de 2025, de https://x.com/@Israel.

[40] PORISRAEL.COM. (2019, diciembre 19). *La teoría y la práctica de la Hasbará*. PorIsrael. https://porisrael.org/2019/12/19/la-teoria-y-la-practica-de-la-hasbara-2/

Israel uses three types of content: informational, persuasive, and expressive. On the informational level, it provides data, news, and objective facts. For example, on May 29, 2025, Israel stated that it had hundreds of humanitarian aid trucks at the Kerem Shalom crossing, 900 inside Gaza, and announced the arrival of 80 more. In addition, it claimed to have distributed 16,000 humanitarian aid packages, each sufficient to support a family for one week[41].

This form of communication has the potential to erode public opinion by offering minorities data or information with which to refute majority views that often rely less on argumentation due to their widespread acceptance. In addition, Israel disseminates persuasive content with ideological, political, and social overtones, promoting ideas, causes, and positions in its favor through posts that make appeals such as: *Helping Hamas is not humanitarian—it is fueling terror*, aiming to invoke the principle of authority and lead audiences to believe that if the Israeli government says it, *it must be true*[42].

Finally, its expressive content conveys emotions, sentiments, and moods. For example, Israel broadcasts images of young people during the distribution of humanitarian aid thanking the American people for their support and asking Hamas to leave. This expressive content seeks to generate social proof (i.e., social consensus) that Hamas is not a desired representative for the Palestinian people[43].

Israel disseminates predominantly defensive content on social media. This strategy is based on the creation of counter-narratives aimed at debunking falsehoods, highlighting contradictions, and providing explanations tailored to different audiences. The ultimate goal is to replace, as much as possible, hostile narratives with one that it considers more truthful from its own perspective.

The frequency with which Israel publishes this type of content is determined by the emergence of information that could undermine its narrative of the right to self-defense. To support this effort, it relies on an official communication infrastructure that operates

[41] ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES[@IDF]. (29 de mayo de 2025). Posts [What te @UN and Hamas don't want you to kmow]. X. Recuperado el 27 de mayo de 2025 de https://x.com/IDF/status/1928189303370166677.
[42] ISRAEL [@Israel]. (30 de mayo de 2025). Post [Aiding Hamás is not humanitarian-it is fueling terror]. X. Recuperado el 30 de mayo de 2025 de https://x.com/Israel/status/1928380440823341062
[43] ISRAEL FOREIGN MINISTRY [@IsraelMFA]. (30 de mayo). Post [President's Macron Crusade Against Jewish State Continues.]. X. Recuperado el 30 de mayo de 2025 de https://x.com/IsraelMFA/status/1928428248976834958

continuously, 365 days a year, through television, radio, and digital platforms, including major social media networks.

However, it also appears that Israel inadvertently reveals some of its vulnerabilities: its dependence on the international narrative shaped by the U.S. and the West, and its constant need to justify its military actions. The quality and activity of Israel's presence on social media reflect a significant investment in media and human resources, suggesting the involvement of professional agencies that have produced highly edited videos in multiple languages, with messages tailored to specific audiences using digital marketing audience analysis methods.

Moreover, Israel may have shown some fragility in its narrative: while showcasing its military power, it also prompted viewers to question the criteria of distinction, proportionality, necessity, and the methods employed by the IDF.

Israel's apparent target audience seems to be Hamas, its direct enemy. However, the ultimate audience for Israel's messages is Western societies—specifically American and European societies—whose support Israel needs. The secondary audience between these two poles is the Palestinian people, who witness this exchange of messages and are left with little hope for a near-term resolution, while also being implicitly warned by both factions against cooperating with either side.

Similarly, there is an unintended audience: the millions of social media users who browse platforms in search of entertainment and information, but who end up being influenced and contributing to the shaping of national and international public opinion.

Israel has developed a robust STRATCOM strategy that combines the extensive use of social media with the dissemination of messages through traditional media such as the press, radio, and television. Israel employs all available means to influence both public and international opinion, favoring the transmission of oral narratives through first-person testimonies, visual content, a high volume of videos, and its strong presence in digital media, including social networks as well as television and radio outlets.

The origin of most Israeli publications comes from Israel, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank, although information is also disseminated from international decision-making

centers with the aim of exposing what they consider to be campaigns intended to discredit the Israeli government[44].

Israel has managed to maintain the support of most Western societies, especially that of the U.S. administration. However, over time, doubts and protests against Israel[45] have begun to emerge, both in Europe and the United States. Despite its close and ongoing relationship with the U.S., Israel does not accept direct interference from the American administration or externally proposed peace plans. Over time, this relationship could be affected if the Israeli government continues to reject the proposals put forward by the U.S. president.

Images and videos related to cognitive warfare are believed to have significantly influenced this shift in the political dynamics of the conflict, once again highlighting their impact on public perception. In both Europe and the U.S., user accounts (whether real or not) have pressured politicians to take action to help stop the conflict. The positions taken for or against Israel, which have emerged as a result of this pressure, have been closely monitored by politicians, who often take note of these demands for electoral purposes.

Polarization has intensified the divide between the administration of Donald Trump (born June 14, 1946) and the European Union, thereby splitting the Western world as a whole. Differences in the perception of the conflict and in the proposed solutions to end it have become a central issue in negotiations between administrations. These discrepancies are frequently addressed, but the lack of immediate solutions, the differing strategies adopted by world leaders, and the uncoordinated pace of action have deepened the rift among Western powers.

This conflict, more than any other global crisis, has highlighted the immense pressure faced by the media. Social media platforms must invest significant resources to debunk the false information circulating about the region, aimed at their audiences. Moreover, the speed and ease with which false content is created far outpace the speed at which it can be debunked, posing a constant challenge for social media networks, which, as sources

[44] ORGANIZACIÓN DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS. (18 de julio de 2024). *La dimensión humana del cambio climático*. Noticias ONU. https://news.un.org/es/story/2024/07/1531636
[45] DEUTSCHE WELLE. (15 de noviembre de 2024). *Borrell apunta contra Israel en su despedida*. DW. Accedido el 6 de mayo de 2025 en: https://www.dw.com/es/borrell-apunta-contra-israel-en-su-despedida/a-70798073

of information, must verify the authenticity of the accounts that generate and disseminate such content.

Hamas's strategy

Hamas has developed a sophisticated strategy since October 7 to achieve its informational goals. The organization has used various sources to disseminate propaganda content aimed at specific audiences, employing different methods to spread its message. The purpose of this media campaign includes political persuasion, the mobilization of supporters on a global scale, the intimidation of the enemy, and the legitimization of its cause in the eyes of public opinion.

The individuals responsible for generating content linked to Hamas are numerous and, in most cases, difficult to identify. As a result, the information being disseminated is often perceived as unreliable or questionable in terms of credibility.

Hamas has few official media outlets. The only television channel it controlled was Al Aqsa TV, which was bombed in 2018 and eventually shut down[46]. However, Hamas maintains a presence on proxy websites, which it uses to issue official statements[47]. For example, the al-Qassam Brigades (its armed wing) operate websites and accounts where they issue calls to action and express their views on international political matters. Hamas has reduced its presence on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X/Twitter, shifting instead toward platforms that offer the protection of personal messaging, which enjoy greater legal safeguards[48].

Nevertheless, Hamas receives support through allied channels and regional media. The Al Jazeera television network has been accused of spreading pro-Hamas information[49]—allegations the Arab network has denied. However, Hamas currently has limited access on the versions of social media apps available through Google Play and the Apple Store,

[46] LA VANGUARDIA (20 de diciembre de 2018). *La televisión de Hamás, Al Aqsa TV, termina hoy sus emisiones*. La Vanguardia. https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20181220/453653134657/la-television-de-hamas-al-aqsa-tv-termina-hoy-sus-emisiones.html

[47] KHATSENKOVA, S. (4 de diciembre de 2023). *¿Creó Hamás un sitio web que se jacta de masacrar a civiles israelíes?* Euronews. https://es.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/12/04/creo-hamas-un-sitio-web-que-se-jacta-de-masacrar-a-civiles-israelies

[48] HARWELL, D., Y LORENZ, T. (2023, octubre 18). *Hamas turns to social media to get its message out*. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/10/18/hamas-social-media-terror/

[49] KIRKPATRICK, D. D., Y RASGON, A. (30 de octubre de 2023). *The Hamas propaganda war*. The New Yorker. https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-hamas-propaganda-war

and instead disseminates its information through the accounts of sympathizers on these platforms[50].

The objectives of Hamas's messages are to call for mobilization and the glorification of the struggle, to praise the "resistance," to spread ideological propaganda, and to create a favorable emotional tone by focusing on Palestinian victims.

Hamas employs various narratives: first, it seeks to demonize Israel as a genocidal and colonial power that violates International Humanitarian Law and the Law of Armed Conflict; second, it aims to portray Hamas as a well-prepared force, capable of fighting and possessing high morale; and third, it seeks to convey the idea that Palestine cannot be saved without the support of third-party countries. We are therefore facing a conflict that is no longer fought solely on the physical battlefield, but also in the symbolic and emotional spheres. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for analyzing the evolution of the conflict and how narratives are constructed and disseminated on the international stage.

Hamas seeks to convey a heroic tone in its messages. These glorified contents are often accompanied by statements in Arabic and English, combined with religious music and epic-style narration, aiming to emotionally mobilize audiences by appealing to both pride and victory. They present the Palestinian cause as a just, global struggle, comparable to indigenous or anti-colonial resistance movements.

Within its narrative, Hamas positions itself as the defender of Islam's holy sites and as a transnational force with influence in Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem, Lebanon, and even within Israeli territory. In this context, it has gone so far as to claim responsibility for military actions from other fronts or other parts of the world.

Hamas does not appear to have invested large sums of money in propaganda since October 7. The quality of its videos is basic, which does not mean they are ineffective. GoPro cameras, mobile phones, and unedited footage are used, supporting a raw and realistic narrative. The videos produced by Hamas generally have lower technical quality compared to those released by Israel. They are mostly third-person recordings showing scenes of despair, destruction, and suffering in Palestinian territory. The titles

[50] THOMPSON, S. A., y ISAAC, M. (18 de octubre de 2023). *Hamas Is Barred From Social Media. Its Messages Are Still Spreading.* The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/18/technology/hamas-social-media-accounts.htm

are usually in Arabic and English, and occasionally in Hebrew—particularly when they contain direct threats to Israel or aim to ridicule the IDF.

Hamas's agenda includes wearing down the Israeli army and calling for international intervention in the territories, such as the one carried out by Iran in June 2026. One of the main objectives of this strategy is to weaken the support Israel receives from Western governments. To that end, any type of information that could generate divisions within democratic societies and cast doubt on the legitimacy of the Israeli narrative is promoted. Some analysts have even identified signs of narrative coordination between Hamas, Russia, Iran, and China—particularly in the use of rhetoric critical of Israel and the West in general[51].

Hamas has demonstrated, despite the quality of its content, a clear communication strategy and a deep understanding of the informational domain. Most of the content disseminated by Hamas originates from Gaza and the West Bank, although its exact origin is difficult to verify due to the use of mass or automated accounts operated from various countries, including some in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Additionally, its strategy is supported by international pro-Palestinian activists and, according to some analysts, indirectly backed by countries such as Iran or Russia.

Hamas, aware of the power of imagery and the global reach of digital media, has launched a strategy aimed at internationalizing its cause. In particular, it has targeted its message toward Generation Z youth, using third-person videos that attempt to present its struggle as a just and universal cause.

Hamas's propaganda appears to be primarily directed at the Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank. In its content, the protagonists are precisely these individuals: men, women, children, and even animals who suffer the consequences of the Israeli army's actions. These consequences include hunger, thirst, and loneliness, the loss of loved ones, unsanitary living conditions, extreme heat, and constant fear. However, while these messages may seem aimed at Palestinians themselves, there is in fact a broader and more strategic audience: international public opinion, particularly throughout the Arab and Muslim world.

[51] BACHMANN, S.-D. D. (2024). *Hamas–Israel: TikTok and the relevance of the cognitive warfare domain*. The Defence Horizon Journal. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378938053

This global audience is key because it has the ability to bring attention to the suffering of the Palestinian people — not necessarily that of Hamas as an organization — on the international political agenda. Political parties and leaders take note of this type of content because it can have an electoral impact or influence diplomatic decisions.

On the other hand, although the Israeli public is not the direct target of this propaganda, it is also exposed to much of this content. Over time, this exposure has generated discomfort, confusion, and internal tensions within Israeli society, particularly regarding its perception of the situation and its own security.

Hamas's communication machinery uses traditional media (TV, radio, print press…) alongside a sophisticated use of digital media and social networks, supported by proxies and state actors, with the goal of bypassing the blocks imposed by most social media platforms and ensuring its message reaches a global audience. The organization maintains a daily and massive presence in cyberspace, using content with strong symbolic value to spread antisemitic and anti-Western messages.

Hamas has produced videos of its attacks. These images were recorded from a first-person perspective and were immediately distributed on social media and in the news media. The footage has been used to portray Hamas terrorists as heroes and to showcase the capabilities at their disposal.

In addition to combat footage, Hamas also produces a small number of edited videos for propaganda purposes. This category includes videos featuring hostages, which serve as tools for indoctrination. The hostages are typically shown either receiving medical treatment or being released. These videos are usually presented in third person and are often accompanied by religious or political exaltations, along with threats directed at Israel.

Live broadcasts and public statements. Broadcasts have been aired from Qatar or Iran featuring religious and political leaders delivering strong messages in support of Hamas and against Israel, Europe, and the U.S. These videos are edited, high-quality productions and are widely shared on social media. Hamas manages to insert its narrative into social media platforms through channels such as *Gaza Now* or *@eye.on.palestine*. These videos and images are disseminated by pro-Palestinian sympathizer accounts, and, ultimately, some influencers or public figures take a stand in favor of the Palestinian people—a message that Hamas leverages to align them with its own discourse.

Hamas has created an ecosystem of influence through traditional media, digital platforms, and social networks, using mass text messaging and covert operations on social media accounts with the goal of intimidating Israeli users, spreading panic, and creating division—similar to tactics used in astroturfing[52] and bot driven campaigns.

Although Hamas has not fully achieved its strategic objectives on the international stage, it has managed to produce certain effects: it has generated pressure on some democratic leaders and contributed to heightening political and social tensions globally. Additionally, it has reinforced its image as a resistance group in the eyes of the international community.

Moreover, its propaganda has contributed to polarizing public opinion, making it more difficult to advance serious negotiations for conflict resolution. This information war has also produced a significant collateral effect: it has eroded trust in traditional journalism and social media as reliable sources of information, leading some international media outlets to reduce their coverage of the conflict due to the lack of ways to verify the information.

Hamas does not appear to be achieving its overall objectives, but it has gained some victories through increased statements from Western democratic leaders and substantial support in the Arab and Muslim world. It has, to some extent, disrupted the international political and social arena. However, this information war is also helping to solidify Hamas's image as a radical and violent group that only garners limited and situational support.

What Hamas does appear to have done is contribute to the polarization of international political and social life, while also increasing tensions in the region and obstructing serious political talks aimed at resolving the conflict. Today, the conflict seems to be spreading throughout the region, and it is possible that it will either continue indefinitely or shift back and forth between a latent conflict and an active one.

[52] A social media communication strategy in which accounts with a certain level of success and a different original theme gradually change and adapt their content until they focus exclusively on a new topic, leveraging their previous success in terms of user base and acceptance.

In the digital context, it is also important to consider the typical behavior of social media users: they generally seek entertainment or information that aligns with their interests. However, they frequently come across content related to the war in Gaza that is not only unentertaining but also disturbing or distressing. This aversive experience of viewing such content can lead to avoidance behaviors and, in some cases, a rejection of the material altogether—pushing the conflict out of their attention and, consequently, out of the collective consciousness.

Conclusions

The cognitive war between Israel and Hamas does nothing but prolong, expand, and intensify the conflict. The rapid exchange of disinformation, malicious content, information manipulation, foreign interference, information operations, and influence campaigns supports the strategies of both sides, helping them disseminate their narratives.

The development of highly technical and layered information strategies makes them extremely effective, enabling precise, targeted effects on pre-selected audiences by appealing to their most basic emotions. The ease with which social media profiles can be created and blocked, along with the massive spread of information and fake users, makes information control a highly complex and costly task. In other words, the accessibility, efficiency, and speed of social networks make the cognitive domain one of the central aspects of this conflict.

Although their everyday use portrays them as harmless tools, their impact on contemporary conflicts is deep and strategic. Unlike visible weapons, the content circulating on these platforms often goes unnoticed by the public, who fail to grasp its severity or consequences. Their 24/7 presence and the strong appeal of images and videos make social networks the ideal stage for influence and persuasion. For these reasons, both state and non-state actors have made them their preferred vehicle for waging cognitive warfare.

Journalism and news agencies, which are expected to continue operating as they always have, have come under unprecedented scrutiny. The speed and immediacy of social media, compared to the time required for proper analysis and news verification, give social platforms the upper hand as information sources. Journalism has suffered from polarization trends that have reinforced users' preferences for media outlets aligned with

their initial views, thereby encouraging the formation of extreme positions and the justification of violence.

Cognitive warfare has played a central role in the increasing polarization of positions at the local, regional, and international levels. Through increasingly sophisticated communication strategies, the actors involved have developed highly persuasive narratives, designed not only to reinforce their own positions but also to discredit those of their adversaries. This dynamic has produced a segmented information environment, where audiences tend to consume content aligned with their preexisting beliefs, while avoiding dissonant viewpoints. As a result, confirmation biases are intensified, and the ability to grasp the complexity of the conflict is diminished. This process reinforces original ideological positions and promotes mechanisms of obedience and conformity toward actors with whom one shares identity or political affinity.

Building a robust national capacity in the information domain is not the task of a single day, nor of a single institution. It is a step-by-step process that requires strategic vision, sustained resources, and multisectoral coordination. Like climbing a staircase, each step represents a necessary move toward a resilient information ecosystem capable of withstanding threats such as cognitive warfare, disinformation, or hybrid operations.

On the first step lies the core objective: developing a strong strategy in the information environment with the capacity to defend and project the national narrative. The second step involves ensuring continuity and access to communication networks, maintaining presence across all possible channels—even in the face of denial-of-service attempts or technological censorship.

The next level demands a distributed infrastructure across the territory, capable of executing mass campaigns without its nodes being easily located or neutralized. But this technical architecture cannot be built without the fourth step: effective collaboration between academia, the armed forces, and the business sector, providing knowledge, operational capacity, and constant innovation.

Further up is the need for specialized training, enabling operations under extreme conditions—from nuclear, radiological, biological, and chemical (NRBC) environments to hybrid warfare scenarios or degraded infrastructures. This step must be complemented by the consolidation of a solid, comprehensive, and up-to-date doctrine in the information domain, providing coherence to the entire structure.

Finally, at the top stands the decentralized organization of coordinated users—a distributed yet cohesive network, capable of acting swiftly, adapting rapidly to new threats, and maintaining narrative control in complex scenarios.

In the current context, marked by hybrid conflicts, digital interference, and invisible wars fought in the cognitive sphere, reaching the summit is a matter national security.

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