

# LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT RADICALIZATION. THE CASE OF HAMAS RADICALIZATION CAMPAIGN AND THE NEW WAVE OF EXTREMISM

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37458/nstf.25.2.8>

Review paper

Received: November 4, 2024

Accepted: December 9, 2024

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**Abstract:** Traditionally, the radicalization phenomenon has been explained as a process of individually or collectively incorporating a violent ideology based on extremism of various factors (ethnic, political, religious) in order to achieve objectives contrary to democracy and the rule of law in a state or society. The wave of extremism implies a thematic tendency in which the energy of massive groups of people is directed to extremist ends. In this article, we analyze the

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elements of a new wave of expanding extremism generated by the crisis in Gaza.

Thus, the article analyzes this event as a turning point for the international security architecture, in comparison with the wave of radicalization initiated by ISIS in the past decade. So, the premise of the article emphasizes that the Hamas terrorist attack represented a trigger for a new wave of extremism with global reverberations. By using a methodology based on a comparative analysis, the article intends to extract the lessons learned from the wave of terrorism generated by ISIS in relation to the new elements identified in the wave of extremism in development determined by Hamas.

The purpose of the research is that, by comparison, we can extract the lessons learned from the experience of a retreating wave of terrorism generated by ISIS. In this sense, in order to draw attention to some early warning aspects, the elements we propose to be analyzed consist of the transnational character, the new-media impact, directing the energy of massive groups, extremist beliefs and desires for societal change.

**Key words:** Hamas, ISIS, waves of extremism, Islamic radicalization, terrorism, hybrid techniques.

## ***Introduction***

The turning point for the international security architecture was the moment of October 7, 2023, called Israel's 9/11 or the new Pearl Harbor. The terrorist organization Hamas orchestrated the terrorist attack against Israel, resulting in almost 1200 Israelis dead and approximately 250 Israelis kidnapped, as a strategic way for Hamas to put pressure on negotiations with Israel (Singer & Brooking, 2023). Hamas's bloody tactics

included ISIS modus operandi in killing victims, torture, and rape, but also tactics of Mexican drug cartels, the slaughter of victims being filmed and posted on the internet in thousands of videos to glorify Hamas terrorist actions to the international community and to inspire fear (Singer & Brooking, 2023). In the immediate aftermath of the October 7 attacks, for example, Hamas sympathizers denied responsibility for the attack and amplified false claims that the group's mass killings were carried out by Israel's own military while simultaneously posting videos of Hamas members torturing Israeli victims and declaring the kidnapping of 200 people (Singer & Brooking, 2023). According to the official data provided by Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, the real number of the abducted person by Hamas on 7 October 2023 was 251 hostages (Israeli Ministry Foreign Affairs, 2024a).

In response, Israel declared war on Hamas and launched a military intervention in Gaza, bombing cities. An avalanche of false information flooded social media platforms during the Israel-Hamas war, with images of atrocities and dead people disconnected from their original context and two pro-Palestinian versus pro-Israeli camps stirring strong feelings among populations, including from other regions of the globe (Chifu & Drăgan, 2024a). Reports indicated that 10,000 Palestinians were killed in the first month of the conflict, rising to 40,000 Palestinians in September 2024. In reality, these figures are circulated by the Hamas-controlled Gaza Ministry of Health in an effort to distort collectively the perception by hyperbolizing the number of victims (Chifu, 2024).

Hamas propaganda relied on the public exacerbation of the number of Palestinian victims in order to achieve a wave of anger at the international level, to discredit Israel at the international level, and to condemn the Netanyahu government for its disproportionate actions. This adverse effect could be seen through South Africa's referral to the International Court of Justice for Israel's genocidal actions in Gaza (Chifu, 2024). It is observed how, although Israel's attack in Gaza had a legitimate cause because of the October 7 terrorist attack and the kidnapping of 251 hostages, the elements of public perception and issues related to proportionality in war (Chifu, 2024) combined with a massive flow of fake news and misinformation have the effect of creating the perfect background for a wave of anger and extremist actions by people in different regions, mobilized by the evolution of the conflict in Gaza (Chifu & Drăgan, 2024a).

Another example where disinformation and propaganda orchestrated by Hamas relied on the largest possible number of Palestinian civilians killed by Israel's intervention to incite mass anger and protest was the bombing of the Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza of October 17, 2023. Although attributed to Israel by Hamas, there was no evidence that Israel carried out the October 17 bombings. Furthermore, reports have shown that fake news flooded social media to orchestrate a false public perception that Israel had launched a retaliatory move ten days after the terrorist attack (Chifu & Drăgan, 2024a). Later on, a documented investigation via Al-Jazeera live camera, had clearly indicated and stated that the bombing of Gaza's al-Ahli Arab Hospital was the result of a rocket misfire from Palestinian Islamic Jihad and not a result of Israel's bombing, clearing the

disinformation and the fake news flood (Al Jazeera, 2023).

Although there have been clashes and wars between Israel and Hamas in 2012, 2014, and 2021, the Hamas-Israel war initiated on October 7, 2023, indicates the signals of an ongoing wave of extremism. The following elements are different compared to past Hamas-Israel confrontations: the estimated or reported number of Palestinian deaths is much higher compared to the number of the second intifada; the extent of fake news and the impact of social media in disseminating information and audio-visuals; and the much more effective and aggressive propaganda launched by Hamas in the virtual environment (Chifu, 2024). Against this background is added the cognitive correlation of the populations with other ongoing crises on the international stage (Syria, Ukraine, Yemen), which sensitize other regions of the globe outside of the conflict. We note that the manner in which Hamas complemented its October 7 terrorist action with propaganda and disinformation caused Israel's legitimate reaction in Gaza to become a cause for radicalization, frustration, and anger, polarization, and social and international pressure against Israel at the international level: in Europe, North America, Australia, and Turkey, thousands of protests for the Palestinian cause have turned from activism into a desire for mobilization and anger, anti-Semitic slogans, or in some cases, even glorification of Hamas (Chifu, 2024). Moreover, in European states such as Sweden and Denmark, there have been attempts at terrorist attacks targeting Israeli embassies after the assassination of Hezbollah's General Secretary, Hassan Nasrallah (Euractiv, 2024).

So, the hypothesis on which we base our research is that the current Hamas radicalization campaign coagulated around the conflict with Israel has the meaning and implications of an ongoing wave of extremism. The differences are notable between the scale of radicalization generated by the 2023 conflict in Gaza compared to other radicalization campaigns of the Palestinian population coordinated by Hamas amid previous wars with Israel. A radicalization campaign, understood in a general sense, is considered the totality of actions and operations of recruitment, training, and dissemination of violent ideology coordinated by a terrorist organization or insurgent group with the aim of changing the societal order in a reference period and area, using the vulnerabilities, collective grievances, and frustrations of a society and coordinating them against legitimate authority (Wilkinson, 2011). The elements of a radicalization campaign can also include terrorist tactics against the declared enemies of the organization, as elements by which the terrorist group identifies itself; following that, these tactics are taught in the training bases to the recruits and practiced at the stage where they move into the action plan from the advanced stage of radicalization (Mccauley & Moskalenko, 2011).

By radicalization campaign in the case of Gaza, we understand the cumulative actions carried out over a period of time by Hamas as a terrorist organization regarding the recruitment of young people and the training of children in Gaza in the jihadist spirit, the dissemination of jihadist propaganda through media means, the indoctrination of the population of Gaza with ideological elements violent, as well as the Hamas strategy of promoting extremist ethno-nationalist objectives through virtual means as well as face-to-face

at the local level (Margolin & Levitt, 2023). The wave of extremism means a thematic cyclicity, a trend with a transnational character in a reference period in which the energy, extremist beliefs, and desires for anti-democratic societal change of massive groups of people are directed (Theodorakis, 2021). However, there is a difference between a wave of extremism and a wave of terrorism. The wave of terrorism includes a trend developed over several years of terrorist actions or attacks launched by a terrorist organization or having as a source of inspiration this group through characteristic tactics and strategies, including the phenomenon of violent radicalization having as a source of inspiration the same terrorist group (Radil & Castan Pinos, 2022). The wave of extremism, on the other hand, can include a wide range of phenomena related to the sphere of extremism: violent radicalization, anti-Semitic actions, ideological and hate speech, extending to terrorist actions (Theodorakis, 2021).

For these reasons, the premise takes shape in the idea that it is possible to compare a wave of terrorism committed by the Islamic State terrorist group in the period 2014-2020 and the ongoing wave of extremism initiated by Hamas following the terrorist attack of 7 October 2023 as the turning point. The aim of the comparative analysis is to extract some lessons learned from the experience of the wave of terrorism generated by ISIS that may constitute warning signals for an ongoing phenomenon, a new wave of extremism that is currently happening indefinitely. The research objective consists in identifying the elements of the ongoing wave of extremism generated by the Gaza crisis, corroborated with the characteristics of the wave of terrorism generated by ISIS, in order to extract similarities and

differences. The methodology used aims to perform a comparative analysis using the reference documents from the specialized literature.

To quantify the research objective, we propose the following research questions:

1. What are the elements that characterize the ongoing wave of extremism generated by the Gaza crisis?
2. What are the similarities and differences of this wave of extremism compared to the wave of terrorism generated by ISIS in the period 2014-2020?
3. What early warning elements can be applied to prevent the new wave of extremism, as lessons learned from the experience of the previous terrorist wave?

We believe that the article brings an element of novelty in relation to previous approaches in the specialized literature related to extremism and radicalization. The notion of a wave of extremism has rarely been addressed in the literature, being understood as a general theme of a global trend over several decades. In relation to the technological dynamism, the sophistication of global threats, and the unpredictability of international crises, we appreciate that it is necessary to rethink the paradigm around the notion of extremism. How do we understand and identify a wave of extremism generated by an international crisis that attracts state and non-state actors with diverse interests but also massive groups of people from different realms characterized by three common



elements: energy, desire for societal change, and extremist beliefs?

### ***Theoretical framework***

The notion of a wave of extremism represents a cycle of activity in a reference period with an international character, which undergoes periods of contraction and expansion, being characterized by the energy, beliefs, and desires for societal change of massive groups of people (Rapoport, 2019). Other authors describe a wave of extremism as a social movement trend, driven by cyclicity, lasting several decades or a generation (Collins, 2021). Analyzing the waves of extremism that have existed until now, four waves of extremism have been identified in the literature: the wave of anarchists, being the first terrorist experience in history from the 1880s; the nationalist and anti-colonialist wave that began in the 1920s and lasted for 40 years; and the wave of far-left terrorism that ended in the 1980s (Rapoport, 2019). The fourth wave of extremism began in 1979 as a manifestation of religious terrorism, being appreciated by some authors as ending in 2025 for the fifth wave of extremism to appear (Rapoport, 2019).

The premise of the existence of the fifth wave of terrorism was disputed in the literature: a part of the authors contradicted the existence of a fifth wave of terrorism (Proshyn, 2015), whereas others have attempted to demonstrate that the fifth wave of extremism has emerged through the lens of far-right terrorism (Collins, 2021). In the same time, some opinions emphasize the fact that itself the theory of four waves of terrorism has lacks in the sense that the research evidence is not strong enough for understanding

a fifth wave of extremism (Millington, 2024), whereas other opinions appreciated that the fifth wave will have the dominant features of the religious wave, but will recreate the character of modern terrorism (Czornik & Szynol, 2022).

We believe that the elements that characterize a wave of extremism are explained by notions similar to Social Movement Theory (SMT). Among the many theories that have explained radicalization from a sociological perspective, SMT focuses on large group dynamics and the individual-group-society relationship (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008). We believe that this theory has relevance in relation to other theories that explain violent radicalization for the following reasons: The research objective aims to highlight the phenomenon of radicalization operating at the group level and its trends at the macro level, not individual cases of radicalization. In addition to the generalizability to massive groups, we also aim to emphasize the media and the new-media impact on the expansion of radicalization campaigns at the transnational level. This element leads to SMT, which explains how, by virtue of the cultural resonance effect, mobilization of large groups of like-minded people can be achieved.

SMT starts from the premise that any social movement is consciously created to challenge the social order; the actors are rational and have a political agenda and determined objectives (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2008), which is why radical movements follow three criteria for quantification of ideological objectives: mobilizing resources, political opportunities, and framing/directing them. SMT explains social movement as a set of opinions and beliefs shared by a population with a view

to societal change or the pre-existing order (Zald and McCarthy, 1987). From the perspective of this theory, radical movements aim to cultivate in society through virtual means, media, or other constructed resources and messages that reflect ideologies, beliefs, or strong feelings of large groups of people (Chifu, 2013). The effect would be the cultural resonance (Berbrier, 1998) of large groups of people and eventually the adoption of radical movement messages as an action to align with ideological goals (Borum, 2011). SMT emphasizes that a radical movement will diagnose societal problems that cause collective frustration and discontent (Gurr, 1970), assign responsibility to some actors, and offer violent solutions and strategies to convince as many people as possible to get involved and align with the same trend of change (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2008).

Following the elements of SMT in this research, Hamas, as a radical movement, seeks to exploit the regional context of the Gaza Strip crisis to create a mobilization potential for recruiting new members and actively promotes an ideological message that reflects Palestinian societal frustrations and grievances in this case related to Israeli aggression. The terrorist organization offers solutions for a new social order for Palestinians imposed by Sharia Law (Halverson et al., 2011) for Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East to mediate as regional politics. To ensure the completeness of the analysis, we propose the definition of the following theoretical concepts with which we will operate: extremism, radicalization, and terrorism. This theoretical delimitation will contribute to the nuance of some theoretical tools, to the extent that in the specialized literature there are no unanimously accepted

definitions in the academic community for the proposed theoretical concepts.

Extremism involves the promotion of violent political or religious ideologies that oppose the democratic values and principles of society or human rights (Drăgan, 2024). Extremist approaches can also include the justification of undemocratic methods demarcated by political or non-state actors in achieving political objectives (Neumann, 2011). However, the scope of extremism can extend from the promotion of ideological justification for committing crimes motivated by hate, xenophobia, or racial cleansing to acts of terrorism or the instigation of acts of violence by glorifying violent ideological objectives with the aim of achieving changes in society or perceptions (Demant et al., 2008). In the category of people who share extremist beliefs are individuals who engage in or provide support for committing acts of violence, but also people who use violent propaganda or an ideological narrative to incite violence (Matusitz, 2023).

Radicalization, on the other hand, represents a psychosocial process in stages through which the individual incorporates violent ideology and radically changes his set of values, beliefs, and behaviors (Sinai, 2012), ending with the rejection of democratic principles and the justification of violence as the only way to achieving political objectives (Ashour, 2009). According to some authors, the radicalization of a group can be understood as an increased commitment to the use of violent means and strategies in political conflicts (Horgan and Braddock, 2010, p. 279.), as a result of the change of personal perceptions in a set of beliefs from increasingly radical that justifies violence to the point of

committing terrorist attacks (Della Porta, 2012). The main pillar of justification for violence and the delegitimization of state authority is extremist ideologies that legitimize racial, national, ethnic, or religious supremacy (Horgan, 2006). The definition of radicalization we share refers to violent Islamic radicalization.

The three specific elements of violent Islamic radicalization are represented by the incorporation and transmission to other people of beliefs motivated by hatred and contempt for the foreign occupation in the Middle East that aims to undermine Islam (Drăgan, 2024), the promotion of a narrative regarding the killing of apostates and non-believers for the association with the enemies of Islam through policies, actions, or lifestyle, and the desire to revive Islamic civilization by establishing a global caliphate or areas of influence where Sharia Law is imposed on all (Matusitz, 2022).

Finally, terrorism involves committing acts of indiscriminate violence against targeted social groups with the aim of promoting panic and chaos and communicating a message supported by a violent ideology and underpinned by a so-called noble cause that provides meaning high (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Terrorism has also been defined as a type of asymmetric conflict for the delegitimization of state authority (Simons & Chifu, 2017), which exceeds common violence (Horgan, 2006), using various tactics to inspire fear in an extended category of the population with the aim of obtaining objectives substantiated by an extremist ideology (Drăgan, 2023). If extremism offers a violent ideological interpretation and urges a dichotomous view of the proposed goals, radicalization

represents a group process of adherence/incorporation of violent ideology (Halverson et al., 2011). However, radicalization can only operate at a cognitive level, or cognitive-behavioral, up to the advanced stage without committing terrorist attacks (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008), or it can operate up to the advanced stage of radicalization, causing the intensification of violent beliefs until the commission of acts of terrorism (Taylor & Horgan, 2001).

## ***New wave of extremism***

### ***Context***

The Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, was one of the bloodiest terrorist attacks, resulting in multiple deaths and 251 people kidnapped by the terrorist organization (Hamoud, 2024). Although it was not the only terrorist attack by Hamas against Israeli targets over time (Jensen, 2009), it represented the most significant blow to Israel, reminding the international community of the long-term impact such an event can have: the declaration of war by Israel against Hamas, the outbreak of an unprecedented level of violence in the Gaza Strip accentuated by the humanitarian crisis, and the generation of a prolonged conflict characterized by polarization, collective radicalization, misinformation, and hybrid actions (Chifu & Drăgan, 2024a).

It is important to mention that on October 8 2023, Hezbollah as well as other Shiite proxies (Al Hashed al Shaabi from Iraq and Houthi rebels from Yemen) waged a war against Israel, as a solidarity sign with Hamas, considering their alliance as Iranian proxies. Therefore, considering the continuous attack on different fronts from Hamas and Iranian proxies, Israel had an obligation

to defend its citizens and to evacuate more than 100.000 Israeli people from their house. In this regard, we noted the pressure of Israel to fight against multiple forces that came separately as Iranian proxies to ally and multiply the tensions initiated by Hamas (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b).

In parallel, Hamas implemented a media strategy after October 7 to introduce the specific elements of an information war that accompanies the battlefield: the group's ability to communicate with the outside world during the fighting by transmitting distorted information about the developments of the war in Gaza via media, providing a counter-narrative to official Israeli accounts. Hamas leaders continued to incite public opinion through new-media tools and applications that: only the use of force can help the Palestinian cause; Israel is not invincible and must be annihilated; Israel must be condemned internationally for the mass killing of Palestinian civilians by hyperbolizing their numbers by offering false data; the Arab states and all Muslims have a duty to join the struggle for the Palestinian cause (Seurat, 2023).

Hamas has been framed by some authors as part of the wave of violent Islamic religious terrorism alongside other Islamist terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah, al-Gama'a al Islamiyya in Egypt, and Al Qaeda (Wilkinson, 2011). The birth of Hamas illustrates the pattern of Social Movement Theory-SMT, being a Palestinian organization active in the Gaza Strip under the acronym Islamic Resistance Movement (Abbas, 2023). Founded in 1987 by Ahmed Yassin during the first Palestinian "Intifada" against the Israeli occupation, Hamas bears the imprint of the Muslim Brotherhood by

virtue of its founding members' s affiliation with the terrorist organization in Egypt (Abbas,2023). Both the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas were terrorist organizations derived from the idea of a resistance movement of communities or large groups of people fighting for the same cause. Later, Hamas expanded the definition of resistance, justifying the use of all means, and included violent techniques and the preaching of Islamic Jihad and martyrdom (Hamoud, 2024). If, at the beginning, Hamas operated against Israel according to the asymmetric war model in the absence of sufficient capabilities, later amplifying its logistics, weaponry, and human resources, the terrorist organization borrowed the tactics of Hezbollah by overwhelming the Iron Dome system with explosives (Levitt, 2007).

Hamas as an organization does not recognize the very existence of the Israeli state and considers that the international Armistice Agreements from 1949 are invalid and through those documents, was tolerated a continuous occupation of the Palestinian territories (Hafez, 2001). Hamas Charter from 1988 emphasized also at article 27, the fact that “The Palestinian Liberation Organization –PLO is the closest to the heart of the Islamic Resistance Movement” (Hamas Covenant, 1988).

Hamas has oscillated between three alternative identities: – an international actor relying on cross-border support as a representative of the Palestinian people; a semi-state actor controlling Gaza and providing government services to the local population after winning the 2006 elections and entering the political scene; as well as a violent movement using military strategies specific to terrorist activity—



indiscriminate killing of people, kidnappings, suicide bombings (Winter, 2014).

In order for the Palestinian population in Gaza to be able to adapt to the living conditions, a factor of the collective radicalization came from the identity dynamics (Chifu et al, 2012), which supported the Hamas ideology through active instruments and constituted in equal measure a tactic of survival of the local population (Chifu & Drăgan, 2024a). Added to this factor is the Palestinians' lack of trust in the Palestinian Authority and Fatah, and on the other hand, the lack of legitimacy and extreme violence of Hamas (Winter, 2014). However, the so-called support of the population of Gaza towards Hamas could be translated more as a protest and an outburst against the Palestinian Authority or the only choice in the absence of other alternatives (Stern, 2024).

As a consequence, we consider that the Hamas attack on October 7 was equally a strategic move: a new war in Gaza can contribute to the consolidation of Hamas' objectives by uniting all the Iranian proxies against Israel considering the second conflict initiated on October 8 2023, but also this strategic move could unleash a wave of complaints, frustrations, and anger from massive groups of Middle Eastern populations to join the Palestinian cause through violence, as well as discrediting and delegitimizing Israel internationally by turning the mirror on the collateral victims resulting from the confrontation in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas experienced an upward trend in popularity, a trend that is characteristic after each Israeli intervention in the Gaza Strip. As of October 2023, Hamas has seen an increase in Arab and Muslim support, tripling in the

West Bank and Gaza (Hamoud, 2024). Although the latest polls have shown continued support for Hamas in the West Bank, popular support is beginning to wane in the Gaza Strip in conjunction with the legitimacy crisis of Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (Stern, 2024).

***Why this campaign of radicalization is different from the other campaigns of radicalization in Gaza?***

Following the elements of the SMT theory, we observe that in the radicalization campaign started after October 7, 2023, the creation by Hamas of the cultural resonance effect that animates large groups of people from other regions is achieved through the transnational character and the new-media impact. We believe that these two elements bring the novelty of the campaign after October 7, 2023, in relation to other radicalization campaigns launched in Gaza by Hamas since the beginning of the founding of the organization. Although Hamas has previously organized radicalization campaigns in Gaza, especially around the conflicts with Israel, in order to gain support, these were characterized by a much smaller audience and operated in a limited geographical area. The new radicalization campaign, extended outside the Gaza Strip, accumulates transnational elements and is energized by technological tools and the new-media impact. The new-media impact after October 7, 2023, is highlighted by the expansion of the radicalization campaign started in Gaza through polarization, manipulation, and disinformation following the impact of the Internet and communication on social networks (González-Esteban et al., 2024) in Asia, America, and Turkey.

The transnational character can be seen in relation to the massive impact of the Gaza conflict characterized by group polarization and radicalization, stimulated by violent narratives of Hamas supporters both in the Middle East and in Europe or the population of Turkey, North America, and Australia, through a series of massive protests against the violence in Gaza combined with hostile narratives against Israel for its armed intervention (Widzer, 2024). Analyzing the narratives of the protesters, we observe how Hamas was able to operate at the level of collective perception to obtain its legitimacy: the line of demarcation between what Hamas represents as a terrorist organization and the Palestinian population as a separate entity is almost blurring (Stern, 2024).

In Europe, there were two terrorist attacks in France and one terrorist attack in Belgium inspired by the Gaza conflict and Hamas propaganda. In India, the pro-Palestinian campaign through protests and religious antagonism actually glorifies the actions of Hamas, and there is confusion between the Palestinian population versus Hamas (Debates, 2023). In Turkey, pro-Palestinian protesters praising the Qassam Brigades and expressing their desire to join Hamas in the conflict with Israel have also been televised, allowing Hamas propaganda to reach a wider audience. Hamas nasheeds also feature members of the Qassam Brigades training with weapons and launching terrorist attacks against Israelis, with powerful audio-visual effects by using new-media tools in the extensive radicalization campaign (Bozkurt, 2023). Based on these two elements, the transnational character and the new-media impact, we appreciate that the series of events in the Israel-Hamas conflict starting on October 7 is generating a new

wave of extremism both outside the Middle East, but mostly inside the Middle East region through the radicalization campaign of Hamas, being sustained and encouraged by the Iranian proxies and the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades as the Political branch of Hamas (Bozkurt, 2023).

***There is generated a new wave of extremism by the crisis in Gaza?***

So, starting from the two previously identified elements—the transnational character and the new-media impact—which lead to the premise that the new radicalization campaign in Gaza after October 7th carries the seeds of an ongoing wave of extremism, to research whether the hypothesis of the paper is confirmed, it is necessary. Let's analyze if we are in the presence of the other three constituent elements. The three constitutive elements of a wave of extremism are:

1. The energy of massive groups of people;
2. Extremist beliefs; and
3. The desire for societal change.

**The energy of massive groups of people** in this case is appreciated, first of all, at the level of the regional community in the Middle East. Analyzing the collective grievances and frustrations of the massive protests organized in the Arab states, but also in Iran and Lebanon in reaction to the killing of Hezbollah's General Secretary, Hassan Nasrallah, the Iranian organization being an ally of Hamas since October 8 in the fight against Israel, as well as other Muslim communities in other regions that support the Palestinian cause, we note the background against which Hamas was able to

operate. As the social movement theory explains using the cultural resonance effect—the Palestinian cause—the terrorist organization uses in the narrative of instigating the revolt and anger at the regional level the idea of joining the conflict and the obligation of every Muslim to fight against Israel, regardless of the region.

Adding to the fact that collective attention is focused on Israel's interventions and attacks in the Gaza Strip and the number of civilian casualties, the new interventions of the Israeli state in Lebanon and Syria in order to be able to fight on multiple fronts against Iranian proxies, amplify the general tension and anger against Israel. Despite this, given the fact that on October 8, 2023 a second war initiated by Hezbollah and supported by the Iranian proxies on multiple fronts, Israel had an obligation to defend the borders and the security of its territory, even though the narratives promoted in the new-media followed to distort the legitimacy of Israel's right to fight into an interpretation of Israel's desire for an escalation in the Middle East (ACLED, 2024).

As a consequence, whether it's Palestinian refugees from other Arab states or Muslim supporters of the Palestinian cause in the Gaza Strip from other Middle Eastern states, the narrative and activist actions demonstrate how a growing number of people are gradually channeling their energy: hatred and anger against Israel and Israelis, grievances, and collective frustration channeled into polarization and radicalization. The way Hamas operates in Gaza and the Middle East involves mobilizing the energy of large masses of people not only cognitively but also through face-to-face recruitment in mosques and schools to join the organization. Hamas uses the existing social and political conditions in Gaza (Palestinian anger

at the victims of the Gaza war, poverty, lawlessness, lack of Palestinian leadership) to direct them into a violent response, promote the conduct of Islamic Jihad, and recruit Palestinian recruits to join the cause of fighting against the Israeli regime (Hroub, 2006).

Recruiting members remains an element in conserving the energy of groups of people and attracting new followers. A source of recruitment is represented by Palestinian universities, within which jihadist materials or posters with jihadist martyrs are disseminated, followed by religious courses and mosques affiliated with Hamas as the main places for recruitment and radicalization. Moreover, the role of women has not been neglected among the strategic movements of the terrorist organization, both in promoting radical discourse, training children in the ideological spirit, or disseminating radical ideas to the general public (Jad, 2013). It is observed that the spirit of the energy of the radical groups in the Palestinian society targets both a religious side by educating the youth of Gaza according to radical Islamic teachings in mosques and centers and the nationalist side by military training of recruits and the appeal to children and youth to embrace the same cause (Seurat, 2019).

The success of channeling the energy of massive groups of people in the Middle East outside of the Palestinians, such as Arab Muslims or Shia Iranians, to join the Palestinian cause is due to the propaganda carried out by Hamas. As a result, against the background of the war with Israel, Hamas continues to register waves of popularity determined also by the adaptability of the organization to societal complaints and grievances that blame Israel for the occupied territory, the magnitude of

civilian casualties in the Gaza Strip or Lebanon, the humanitarian and economic crisis, but also the prolonged wars (Simons & Chifu, 2023).

Outside the Middle East, based on the use of the new-media strategy by Hamas, the wave of extremism generated by the Gaza crisis also included other regional spheres such as Europe, Australia, or North America, India (Debates, 2023) by creating the effect of cultural resonance (Della Porta & Diani, 2005). Two consequences can be distinguished: joining massive protests that exceed the notion of activism through pro-Hamas or anti-Israel messages, as well as online hate narratives against Israelis or Jews and the demonization of Israel's actions (Renard & Cook, 2023). The wave of collective complaints, frustrations, cultural resonance with the Gaza crisis, and the shaping of the idea of resistance, of revolt, of a narrative inciting hatred and violence on pallets from social categories in various regions such as Europe, Australia, and America contribute to the amplification of hatred and violence towards Israel and Jews in an environment of social polarization fueled by strong emotions and extremist narratives (Chifu & Drăgan, 2024a).

The second constituent element, **extremist beliefs**, rests on the violent ideological pillar promoted by Hamas propaganda. Elements of the terrorist organization's ideological narrative are taken up and promoted by the energy of massive groups of people to justify the need for societal change in line with the organization's goals. Moreover, the ideological pillars constitute the source of the justification of the violence and atrocities committed by Hamas, but also the origin of the legitimacy that the terrorist organization attributes to itself. Hamas' stated

goals are to transform the ethno-politically motivated Palestinian struggle against Israel into a religious fundamentalist conflict and to direct the anger of the Palestinian people against Israel, seen as the main enemy and responsible for the humanitarian crisis and deaths in Gaza (Hroub, 2006). The stated goals of the terrorist organization's statute refer to the liberation of the occupied Palestinian territories, using a radical Islamic framework, the elimination of Israel's political objectives, and the recognition of Palestinian rights in relation to the "Zionist project" (Levitt, 2007).

From an ideological point of view, Hamas presents the following ideological pillars: the land of Palestine is for future generations an inheritance for Muslim generations until the Day of Judgment, and extremist nationalism is part of the religious creed. The occupation of the territory by the so-called enemies of Islam and the usurpation of the right of the Palestinians by the Jews leads to the duty of every Muslim to wage Jihad becoming the individual duty of every Muslim. Jihad is not only limited to terrorist attacks and military confrontations but also the dissemination of ideology by writers, intellectuals, media people, orators, educators, and teachers in the Arab and Islamic worlds (Levitt, 2009).

However, we need to emphasize that the major consequence of amplifying this ideological narrative against Israel after October 7, 2023, led to the situation where Israel was unfairly accused of double standards by the West and the US in terms of the Palestinian casualties caused by bombing hospitals, mosques, and schools, because of the 30,000 rockets that were launched during the conflict (Times of Israel, 2024). This technique of



blaming Israel for the Palestinian casualties determined a wave of anger towards Israel's legitimate right to defend. In addition to that, Israel warned the local population to evacuate from the area into humanitarian corridors in order to avoid civilian casualties compared to Hamas or the Iranian proxies that didn't pursue the efforts (ABC News, 2024).

Although compared to other terrorist organizations in the Middle East, Hamas operates in a geographically limited area; however, the radicalization campaign is strategically planned and rooted in Palestinian society (Loewenthal et al., 2023). The tendency of the wave of extremism to expand towards the Arab states, North America, Australia, and Europe (González-Esteban et al., 2024) develops on the basis of the "cultural resonance" effect. Even if the initial geographical area of operation of Hamas targets the Palestinian territory, in the spirit of the social movement against the background of the conflict in Gaza, but also of the conflicts with Israel in neighboring states such as Lebanon and Syria.

Common elements of the Hamas narrative include accusations of Israeli aggression regarding the number of Palestinian casualties by committing war crimes from the bombing of hospitals, mosques, and schools. A second element concerns the double standards of Israel, the West and the US. The third element consists in identifying Hamas as a national liberation movement and not as a terrorist organization. The fourth element refers to seeking international action against Israel at the International Criminal Court in The Hague for war crimes against the Palestinians and criticizing Egypt for obstructing humanitarian aid transit routes to Hamas (Jensen, 2009). In all these ways, Hamas seeks to gain

international legitimacy by distorting public perception and attracting new followers through polarization and radicalization: using the general public's empathy and resonance with Palestinian suffering, projecting blame onto Israel as the responsible actor, and identifying Hamas as the defender of rights Palestinians and humanitarian aid manager. Thus, Hamas constructed its Islamist propaganda by addressing a dichotomy to the Palestinian people between the ultimate truth held by radical Islam and the double standards of the infidels, referring to Christians and Jews (Winter, 2014). Starting from the idea of "Israeli occupation" of the Palestinian territories and the distorted interpretation according to which "resistance" is considered a duty of all Arabs, Palestinians, and Muslims, Hamas successively won wars in 2008-2009, 2012, and 2014 (Seurat, 2019), a fact that is amplified in the current conflict in Gaza.

**Regarding the desire for societal change,** Hamas has a tactic of adapting its status according to political changes in the region, diagnosing the problems of Palestinian society (Widzer, 2024), and assigning blame to political actors such as Israel and the United States, thus gaining control, popularity, and a false legitimacy (Jensen, 2009). In the Gaza Strip, Hamas has demonstrated flexibility in using collective Palestinian frustrations against the political measures initiated by Israel and circumventing public perception to gain so-called legitimacy on the political and social scene in the Gaza Strip (Wagemakers, 2010). The desires of the Palestinian population for societal change understood in a moderate sense aim at an autonomous Palestinian territory, independence, and international recognition. What exceeds this just societal desire for a two-state solution is the hate narrative against Israel and the Jews. The

desire for societal change understood in an extremist sense aims at the annihilation of Israel by Hamas and the Axis of Resistance, the destruction of Jews and Israelis, and the imposition of Sharia throughout the newly acquired Palestinian territory.

The way in which Hamas has sought to implement the seeds of hatred in Palestinian society to achieve this change has already been seen in other radicalization campaigns in Gaza by: recruiting and indoctrinating members to build local support, training children and youth in training to undermine moderate ideas in society in the long term (Levitt, 2009). The narrative of hatred directed against Israel as the sole actor responsible for the poverty and suffering of the Palestinians is taught to children from a young age through radical ideology in summer camps, campuses, schools, and mosques. They also receive semi-military training, being surrounded by messages and images of martyrs. The declared purpose of these activities is to plant the seeds of hatred in the Palestinian society against Israel, using media tools as the children's magazine "al-Fateh," in which jihadist martyrdom is praised, suicide terrorist attacks are glorified through interviews, video clips and photographs of martyrs, and Israel is demonized (Levitt, 2009).

Hamas does not pursue societal change only on a cognitive level. Like any terrorist organization, changes in Palestinian society aimed at delegitimizing the Palestinian Authority and gaining political and social control by Hamas. The next step was to gain legitimacy at the international level using the hybrid techniques of disinformation and culpability of Israel on the international stage. One of the traditional ways of

operating since the establishment of the organization refers to suicide attacks by urging children, teenagers, and young people to embrace martyrdom or promote it as a heroic gesture, after which their families will benefit from financial assistance (Seurat, 2019). Hamas initiated propaganda justifies these suicide attacks as a response by the organization to Israel's killing of Palestinian civilians, and the practice is to end if Israel ceases attacks in the Strip, leaving room for an endless vicious circle (Hroub, 2006). The organization's societal change efforts are doubled by the ideological propaganda disseminated through new-media, which appeals to a wider audience, with Hamas having websites in Arabic, English, Russian, French, Farsi, Urdu, and Malay on servers in the United States, Russia, Ukraine, and Indonesia (Levitt, 2007). Moreover, after October 7, Hamas urged the international public to mobilize through protests through new-media, including al-Aqsa and al-Jazeera television, websites, Facebook pages, and Twitter (Margolin, 2020), contributing significantly to expanding the target audience from America to Malaysia.

## ***Comparative study Hamas versus ISIS***

### ***Context***

ISIS as a terrorist organization has in turn contributed to a wave of extremism, being categorized by some authors as the fifth wave of terrorism based on its transnational character. ISIS, known as the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, or Daesh, was founded by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi by proclaiming the Caliphate in 2014 and establishing control in Mosul and Raqqa, the dominance being defeated in Iraq in 2017 and in 2019 in Syria (Braddock

& Harrison, 2016). The terrorist group inspired a new wave of extremism in Europe and other regions, with foreign fighters radicalizing and traveling to Syria and Iraq to join the cause of the Caliphate (Ralstin, 2024). More than 3,000 foreign fighters have been recruited by 2016 from France, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Austria, and the Netherlands, inspired by terrorist propaganda materials and videos in which ISIS addresses collective grievances and frustrations against Western authority and mobilizes to action by traveling to Syria and Iraq (Qi, 2024) and fulfilling the duty to wage Jihad and live under the Islamic Caliphate (Speckhard & Ellenberg, 2020).

Currently, the Islamic State has seen the formation of several entities in various regions, such as ISIS-Khorasan in Afghanistan and ISIS in North and West Africa (Siegle, 2017) after withdrawing from Syria and Iraq (Qi, 2024). The danger of ISIS continues both through the strategy of disseminating violent propaganda in the virtual environment and social networks (Cottee & Cunliffe, 2020) and the narrative of romanticizing terrorist actions and drawing young people into jihadist fantasy. An example would be the bloody attack in the Crocus City Concert Hall in Moscow attributed to ISIS-K, as a result of which 137 people died in 2024 (Chifu & Drăgan, 2024b).

### ***ISIS's wave of terrorism elements***

The wave of terrorism generated by ISIS was characterized by the transnational element related to the high number of foreign fighters joining the fight in Syria from various regions such as Europe, Asia, and some Arab states, as well as regarding the offshoots of the

parent organization operating in various regions: North and West Africa, the Philippines, Maghreb, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan (Bin Hassan, 2016). The media impact consisted of a unique promotion strategy launched by ISIS using social media tools and video games, which contributed to the internet radicalization of audiences with different cultural backgrounds. ISIS propaganda has also become so visible because of new-media techniques as promotion strategy through a use of social media instruments as Twitter, YouTube, LiveLeak, Facebook, and Instagram platforms and the translation of materials into international languages to be understood by non-Arabic users (Prezelj & Zalokar, 2023). The use of the Internet has been one of the pieces of resistance for terrorism, both for expanding access to Islamic propaganda, recruiting a significant number of people from various regions of the globe (Bin Hassan, 2016), and raising funds and financing terrorist activities (Ceron et al., 2019). Using this method, ISIS was able to recruit and radicalize a large number of foreign fighters not only from Europe but also from Asia through online interactions (Ralstin, 2024).

In terms of channeling the energy of massive groups of people, it was aimed at mobilizing a significant number of people from various regions of the globe to fulfill the organization's goals, namely the formation of a global caliphate in which Sharia law rules worldwide. The direction in which ISIS aimed to channel the energy of groups of radicalized people was to commit as many high-profile atrocities as possible to create chaos, to use the vulnerabilities of unstable states in administration, poverty, or crises to take control, and to recruit as many people as possible from various regions to join the Jihad and to adhere to a reinvented Islam (Drăgan, 2023). With

the motto of "stealing the minds of recruits and conquering territories," ISIS directed the groups' energy towards consolidating power compared to other terrorist organizations that focused on wounding the enemy (Styszynski, 2014). The second element, the extremist beliefs of radicalized groups, justified the terrorist attacks carried out by ISIS members against the enemies of Islam, such as non-believers who do not have the Muslim religion or moderate or Shia Muslims (Arosoaie, 2015), apostates or state actors (USA, the West, Israel, etc.) that do not share the radical Salafist vision (Levitt, 2007).

The purposes of carrying out Jihad are explained by the ideology of ISIS through qital al-nikaya and qital al-tamkin, that is, the objective to injure the enemy and the objective to strengthen its control over a territory (Arosoaie, 2015). Another element of ISIS ideology consisted of reinventing Islam without theoretical foundations, restoring the Caliphate of the Prophet, imposing Jihad and violence as the only option, and distorting reinterpretation of themes and vocabulary from hadiths and the Qur'an to gain theological legitimacy of its objectives (Abu Melhim et al., 2023). By applying qital jihad, ISIS pursued a hybrid strategy using active tactics through cyber-attacks, but combining, in the same time, the active tactics with a powerful new-media strategy by providing tools to assist jihadists in disseminating violent propaganda in the virtual environment and promoting the jihadist ideology to legitimize their objectives in order to attract sympathizers and to recruit new members (Czornik, 2024).

The incidence of the third element, namely the desire for societal change, subsists in the declared objectives of the Islamic State as a double identity: that of a state apparatus that governs a territory with global ambitions to dominate, as well as a tool of repression for the imposition of Islamic Law Sharia through violence and the killing of those who do not obey (Willoughby, 2016). The ways in which ISIS causes societal changes are the seizure of territory and the imposition of Sharia as a law aimed at active tactics by destabilizing the territory and multiple terrorist attacks and activities of human trafficking, oil and labor trafficking to circumvent tax regulations, but also illicit trade in cigarettes or kidnapping people for ransom (Ralstin, 2024). In the European space, ISIS aimed to instill a sense of terror (Czornik, 2024) and the recruitment of foreign fighters, developing passive tactics through the promotion of a new-media strategy with violent audio-visual materials (executions, beheadings accompanied by nasheeds), incitements to violence against the enemies of Islam (Rowe & Saif, 2016), and the distribution of jihadist magazines Dabiq translated into several languages: English, French, Russian, and Turkish with strong visual effects and available to the general public on the Internet (Styszynski, 2014).

### ***Similarities and differences between two waves of extremism***

First, a major difference between the ongoing wave of extremism generated by the Gaza conflict and the wave of terrorism generated by ISIS is that in the case of supporting Hamas, the activities include a broader scope (anti-Semitism, hate speech, activism through the series of protests, cognitive radicalization), while in the case of



the wave generated by ISIS, the palette was limited to behavioral radicalization, the advanced stage of the Islamic type, or the transition to an action plan through terrorism. The second difference exists in the shades that the ongoing wave generated by the conflict in Gaza can take: from activism for ethnic or nationalist causes to Islamic militancy or jihadism in the case of suicide attacks. It can also operate in the opposite direction through the counter-reaction of the opposing camp, pro-Israel supporters, and creating an effect of political right-wing extremism. Comparatively, the wave of terrorism spawned by ISIS portrayed a major nuance: Islamic militancy/jihadism.

Analyzing the transnational character of both phenomena, one can observe the employment of a massive number of people: foreign fighters or the local population from several regions located in the case of ISIS. On the other hand, in the case of Hamas, although it operates in a single limited geographical area compared to ISIS, the ongoing wave may attract more supporters compared to the multiple shades of extremism that characterize the wave. It is not only about terrorism or the possibility of terrorist attacks or radicalization. The ongoing wave of extremism can operate both inspired by Hamas through a variety of activities that exceed the notion of terrorism (anti-Semitism, xenophobia, hate speech), but can also operate as a counter-reaction to anti-Israel opprobrium through the far-right effect of pro-Israel supporters in wide areas. Noting the indisputable new-media effect, the propaganda generated by Hamas as well as ISIS in the online environment and social media tools uses common societal grievances and levels of collective frustration to

call for mobilization, find responsible actors, and assign blame.

The violent Islamic goals in both cases aim to entrench a culture of polarization and radicalization, particularly targeting the young population. In both waves, the impact of technology and online social media channels has been used to promote violent propaganda to a wider audience beyond the original Middle East area of operation for terrorist organizations to expand their influence. In addition to the popularity gained on channels such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc., jihadist publications translated into languages of international circulation contributed to adapting the tactics of terrorist organizations to societal trends and constructions, attracting new followers, and reinventing themselves (Ralstin, 2024).

If the energy of the masses was directed in the case of the wave inspired by ISIS towards the conquest of territories in various geographical areas as a quasi-state and ambitions for the establishment of a global Caliphate, in the case of Hamas the energy is directed for supreme control in Gaza and the acquisition of an autonomous Palestinian territory, in that Hamas be recognized as a representative and internationally accepted entity under the guise of an Islamic resistance movement and not a terrorist organization, but also the destruction of the State of Israel. We observe that the societal changes targeted by Hamas focus on the destruction of a democratic state and the achievement of representative legitimacy at the international level by state actors. However, a conflict with Israel has determined the attraction of several actors in the struggle, as well as populations from different regions,

to a much more extensive wave of extremism compared to the wave generated by ISIS.

### ***Conclusions: Lessons learned about radicalization***

The lessons learned from the experience of the wave of extremism generated by ISIS contribute fundamentally to the understanding of threats that are replicated or expanded in the current Hamas radicalization campaign. Although there are considerable differences in ideological nuance between the two organizations, the impact of jihadist propaganda and ideological narrative creates security risks at the regional level. As we have noted, Hamas has expanded its sphere of influence, mobilizing through pro-Palestinian protests considerable masses of people globally. Moreover, the risks are multiplied by the fact that terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda have already taken advantage of the hysteria and general polarization caused by the conflict in Gaza to incite online users to carry out terrorist attacks against Jewish targets in Europe and other regions (Renard & Cook, 2023), while Hamas' appeal focused on asking its followers to continue demonstrations and protests abroad and to condemn Israeli actions (Renard & Cook, 2023).

Although the idea of protest is a constitutional right, security risks are generated by the distorted collective perception between the identity of Hamas as a terrorist organization versus Hamas as an Islamic resistance movement and liberator/savior of the Palestinians. The direct consequence is the accumulation of strong emotions and hostile feelings towards Israel, and broadly according to the Hamas narrative, the perception of injustice tolerated by Israel's allies, such as the US and

Western states. The lessons learned from the wave of extremism generated by ISIS, that can have applicability to the case of Hamas wave, relate to the following elements:

1. The impact of new-media and social media decisively contributes to the amplification of the radicalization campaign at the collective level through elements of propaganda narrative, disinformation, and radical ideology that determine the strong feelings of anger and disgust against the national authorities and mobilization to fight. The transnational character of a radicalization campaign, its expansion by joining foreign fighters, mercenaries, and other categories, is achieved through new-media instruments or social media tools, regardless of the initial region of the conflict.
2. Young people, teenagers, and children represent the social categories targeted for recruitment to join the jihadist cause on the basis of their still-forming personality, psychological susceptibility and positive response to the idea of a jihadist utopia and praise of martyrdom. The idea of activism through protests for a noble cause can very easily degenerate into militancy and incitement to violence and gradually evolve into radicalization as a stage.
3. Calls for mobilization, for action at the expense of state legitimacy, as well as joining the fight for a noble cause by virtue of the idea of cultural resonance and resistance, represent one of the first steps in radicalization campaigns, at least on a cognitive level. The transition from the cognitive to the behavioral level and finally reaching the

advanced stage of radicalization and committing terrorist attacks are simple, gradual phases from the moment when the ideological seeds were planted.

4. In the case of ISIS, the consequences of a wave of terrorism resulted from the assumption as a terrorist organization, which led to the phenomenon of Islamic radicalization and terrorism. In the case of the ongoing wave, we are faced with a wide range of actions in the sphere of extremism that are much more difficult to control, generated by the false narrative of Hamas that it identifies itself as an Islamic resistance movement, not a terrorist organization. Therefore, by identifying in the narrative Hamas as a resistance movement and not as a terrorist organization, this would represent a risk and a first step towards justifying Hamas actions as legitimate societal changes.

A first step in preventive actions so that the ongoing wave does not evolve consists in the actions that each state should undertake through its own awareness campaigns, with an impact on collective perception to counter the narrative generated by Hamas and embraced by many actors. The propaganda narrative seeks to create a deliberate confusion at the level of global public perception between the members of Hamas and the Palestinian population, or the portrayal of Hamas as an entity protecting the rights of Palestinian civilians. Hamas's use of a narrative that combines victimization and collective grievance and confiscates the Palestinian cause in the charge of a terrorist organization leads to the portrayal of Israel as the sole culpable actor for the suffering of Palestinian civilians. The entrenchment of these mentalities can contribute to a wave of anger that

can be directed against Israeli civilians as well as Jews in other territories, leading to anti-Semitic actions as well as terrorist attacks against Israeli targets on the territory of other states.

A second step of prevention consists in the vigilance of the authorities on the new-media tools used during this period and the signals that indicate the advanced stage of radicalization in order to prevent the transition to an action plan and the commission of terrorist attacks inspired by the wave of extremism generated by Hamas. The perpetrators can carry out lone-wolf terrorist attacks on Israeli or Jewish targets in the European space without being affiliated members, as happened in the case of the wave of terrorism inspired by ISIS. We recall the case of the Israeli embassies attacked with explosives on the territory of the Nordic states, Sweden and Denmark, a few days after the assassination of the Hezbollah's General Secretary, Hassan Nasrallah by Israel.

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