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THE *MUQAWAMA* (RESISTANCE): THE CASE OF HAMAS

Abstract

The view of Hamas as an insurgent movement seeking the destruction of Israel and the construction of an Islamic State on historical Palestinian territory is based on its own doctrine, known as the “muqawama” or resistance doctrine. The “muqawama doctrine” has its own distinctive elements and is independent of classical insurgency frameworks; hence, these new elements constitute a valuable analytical tool for the study of emerging insurgent and Islamist phenomena.

KeyWords

Hamas, muqawama doctrine, insurgency, Islamism, Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent months, the Western world has seen the proliferation of armed conflicts involving, in one way or another, different Muslim jihadist groups in the Middle East region. However, it was the third Gaza War in July and August 2014 that confirmed the existence of a conflict spearheaded by a militant group that was founded in 1987 but whose roots can be traced back to the spread of the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the region in the 1940s. We are referring to the Islamic Resistance Movement or Hamas.¹

We define insurgency as a popular movement that aims to overturn an established authority (government, occupying power or political authority) using ongoing political and armed conflict, such as subversion, and the wide range of political activities that this entails, in addition to insurrection, armed conflict and terrorism. Assuming that the main contemporary insurgencies² contain specific fighting procedures that were adopted as a logical strategy in keeping with the ideology on which they are based, and that they all have basic structural elements in common, such as like-minded social bases and the consolidation of a territory they aim to liberate, then we can conclude that Hamas is an insurgent actor,³ given that the characteristics of the group fit the proposed definition. This article aims to present and clarify the doctrine on which the Islamic Resistance Movement is based and explore how this doctrine, known as “*muqawama*” or resistance, impacts the concept of armed conflict developed by Hamas.

1 Hamas is an acronym of the Arabic phrase *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyah* or the Islamic Resistance Movement.

2 When I speak of the main types of contemporary insurgency, I am referring to two cases in particular: firstly, the Maoist insurgency -the Chinese people’s war- based on guerrilla warfare in rural areas, the doctrine of which was developed by Mao Tse-Tung. On *Guerrilla Warfare*, Thousand Oaks; BN Publishing, 2007. And, secondly, the Algerian insurgency during the Algerian War of Independence based on terrorist warfare and analyzed in detail by GALULA, David. “Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice”; Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006. Finally, we should mention hybrid models such as urban guerrilla warfare, which had a limited but strong impact in South America in the 1970s, with MARIHELLA, Carlos. “Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla”; Charleston: CreateSpace, 2011, being the main author on this doctrine.

3 See GUTIÉRREZ, Beatriz. “Hamas: de actor insurgente a interlocutor obligado”, *Documento de Opinión* 22/2013, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, 2013.

2. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE MUQAWAMA (RESISTANCE) CONCEPT AS AN INSURGENCY DOCTRINE

The word “*muqawama*” means “resistance” or, more accurately, “constant combat” or “persistent warfare”.⁴ The first seeds of the doctrine were sown in the military and political circles of two insurgent movements of the Middle East and the struggle against Israel, that is, Hezbollah and the early Hamas of the late 1980s. Markedly Islamist authors such as Abdullah al-Azzam and Yusuf al-Qaradawi contributed, with their works and preaching, to the development of the theory of the *muqawama* doctrine and established the jurisprudential guidelines to follow on aspects such as the difference between suicide (*intihar*) and martyrdom (*istihad*),⁵ the conceptualisation of the territory and the possibility of establishing a ceasefire with the enemy.

However, it was not until the early 21st century that the resistance doctrine emerged on the scene, firstly during the Second Lebanon War (July 2006) between Hezbollah and Israel, and secondly, during the three Gaza wars between Hamas and Israel: in December 2008-January 2009 (Operation Cast Lead),⁶ November 2012 (Operation Pillar of Defense) and July-August 2014 (Operation Protective Edge).

However, what elements of the *muqawama* doctrine have led to its consideration as an insurgency doctrine? The conceptualisation of the armed struggle can be found in a number of aspects, such as:⁷

- Adaptability and pragmatism. An essential element for the survival of any insurgency is the ability to adapt to changes in the conflict ecosystem, an ability that must be demonstrated both in the political spectrum, as well as in the social and military ones.⁸ The *muqawama* doctrine believes that adaptability is largely

4 YAARI, Ehud. “The Muqawama Doctrine”, Policy Analysis, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 13 November 2006.

5 MOGHADAM, Assaf. “The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al-Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks”, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008, p. 21.

6 Many authors see a connection between the two wars and highlight common operational aspects; see the works of FARQUHAR, Scott (Ed.). “Back to Basics. A Study of the Second Lebanon War and operation CAST LEAD”, Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2009; and JOHNSON, David. “Hard Fighting: Israel in Lebanon and Gaza”, Santa Monica: RAND Co., 2011.

7 MILSTEIN, Michael. “The Challenge of al-Muqawama (Resistance) to Israel”, Strategic Assessment, 12/4, 2010, pp. 57-71.

8 SELA, Avraham; MISHAL, Saul. “The Palestinian Hamas. Vision, Violence and Coexistence”, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, pp. 46-48.

achieved through pragmatism, which can also be linked to the *dawah* doctrine.⁹ The *dawah* doctrine is a direct legacy of the Muslim Brotherhood and is based on the idea of returning to traditional Islamic values through education, the study of Islam and the provision of social services as a way of reconstructing identity. As we shall see later on, *dawah* and *muqawama* are interlinked in the insurgency doctrine of Hamas¹⁰ and, while the latter remains basically stable, the former endows the entire theoretical system with the flexibility needed to readapt itself to changes in the conflict ecosystem.

- Concept of victory. In armed conflict, how each side interprets victory is a vital consideration. While military victory can be defined in Western doctrine as the destruction of the enemy or its military capabilities, the *muqawama* doctrine takes a more flexible view of the concept: on the one hand, military victory means preventing the enemy – Israel, in this case – from achieving its operational goals and, on the other, it is resistance, i.e., withstanding a level of damage to the organisational structure and military infrastructure that nevertheless allows it to continue the armed conflict.¹¹ This definition of victory is particularly important for maintaining the movement’s legitimacy and uniting its social bases because it lowers military expectations from destroying the enemy to mere survival.
- Concept of peace. Peace is not an option, given that the very concept of *muqawama* is associated with permanent resistance. The continuation of the armed struggle against the enemy invader is similar to the “protracted war” envisaged in classical insurgency models and especially in the Maoist model. War must continue until victory is accomplished and it will only be interrupted in the circumstances provided for by case law – i.e., in the event of a *hudna* (truce or armistice) or a briefer and more temporary truce, commonly known in Arabic as the *tahdia* (calming). The concept of *hudna* has its origins in the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah in the year 628, when Muhammad and his followers tried to make the first pilgrimage to Mecca and, after confronting the Quraish tribe,

9 Dawah: preaching, proselytising.

10 ABU-AMR, Ziad. “Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza”, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994”, pp. 23-27.

11 A good example of this theoretical articulation is the joint declaration issued by the Islamic Resistance forces following the third Gaza War (July 2014): “Gaza and its resistance triumphed, because they have done what major armies could not. They forced their enemy to retreat, and disrupted its air, land, and sea systems. They took the initiative against their enemy and did not let it achieve any strategic or tactical accomplishment. They crushed their pride that they developed for decades on the media screens and in the psychological warfare laboratories - they crushed it beneath the feet of the mujahideen and the heroic resistance”, from the al-Qassam Brigades’ website. Declaration issued by the military wings of the Resistance factions. Gaza city.

signed a ten-year peace treaty. This treaty provided that the Quraish surrender and convert to Islam or that hostilities would be resumed following the agreed period, which could be used by both parties, and particularly Muhammad's, to rearm and recover its strength.¹² The concept of *tahdiya*, on the other hand, is a common-law reinterpretation of the *hudna* and is often associated with unilateral declarations of ceasefires. Indeed, unilateralism is one of the main differences between the *tahdiya* and the *hudna*, given that the latter means acknowledging the existence – although not necessarily the legitimacy – of the counterparty to the armistice, while the *tahdiya* does not require any de facto or de jure recognition of this unilateralism whatsoever¹³ and the truce may be broken without it being morally or judicially punishable.

- Perception of asymmetry. Asymmetry is seen as an essential part of strategy. The *muqawama* doctrine does not aim for a balance of forces, but rather confrontation through unconventional means and procedures, such as guerrilla warfare and terrorism.¹⁴ This breaks the morale of the enemy because of the mismatch between the normal resources and procedures of an army and the conflict ecosystem, which the *muqawama* creates. As a result of this approach to asymmetry, and linked with the adaptability factor we mentioned earlier, the aim is the continuous improvement and innovation of weapons and technology in order to maintain an element of surprise and, therefore, persecution in future confrontations.
- Personal sacrifice or the greater jihad and its integration into the “holy war” or lesser jihad. According to the *muqawama* doctrine, the insurgency's social bases draw no distinction between the Mujahideen or fighters and the active and passive support not involved in the armed struggle. The personal sacrifice made by the *Mujahid* fighting the holy war (from now on the *jihad*) has become the cornerstone of the *muqawama* doctrine by compromising the life of the fighter and placing it at the service of the jihad.
- The concept of civilian population. Following on from the previous aspect, the civilian population's value as a social base differs from other contemporary insurgency models. While in classical insurgency models, maintaining legitimacy

12 ABU-SWAY, Mustafa. “The Concept of Hudna (Truce) in Islamic Sources”, *Palestine-Israel Journal*, 13/6, 2006.

13 HALEVI, Jonathan. “The Hamas interest in the Tahdiya (temporary truce) with Israel”, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 8/4, 2008.

14 For example, Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, a Hamas leader and the successor of Sheikh Yassin after the latter's death in March 2004, has stated that suicide terrorism is one of Hamas's most effective methods of warfare and that it was the only capable of rivalling the impact of the Israeli's F-16s. In CRAGIN, Rebekah. “Palestinian Resistance through the Eyes of Hamas”, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2008, p. 185.

is closely linked with guaranteeing the physical integrity of the population in liberated territories, the insurgency doctrine sees the entire population as a fighter in the insurgency process. Going back to the subject of personal sacrifice, *muqawama* ideologists have broadened the meaning of the concept “*shahid*” or martyr to include every individual who dies while fighting in the prolonged resistance against the enemy invader. Therefore, the *shahid* is not only the combatant that sacrifices himself (*Ishtishhad*); he is also the person that is killed in a traffic accident on an Israeli road.¹⁵ We cannot ignore the fact that the *muqawama* doctrine places both the *Mujahid* and the *shahid* (martyr) in the same broad category, which encompasses the combatants and the social bases of the resistance that are not necessarily involved in the *jihad*. This it is one of the specific elements of the doctrine and eliminates the difference between the civilian population and the combatants within the insurgency itself. This separation is maintained in propaganda in relation to the conflict ecosystem and, within this, in international public opinion, with all the implications this has for the aforementioned issue of civilian deaths.¹⁶

- Perception of territory. The importance that the *muqawama* doctrine attaches to territory differs from that of other classical insurgency models, which highlight the importance of turning the liberated area into a secure base from which to expand the armed struggle. In contrast, the *muqawama* doctrine plays down the value of the controlled territory and instead stresses the importance of denying the enemy control over the area. Hence, the territory is not just seen as a secure base, but also as an area of operations. This means that the liberated territory is used both for the construction of a sort of insurgent para-state, which encompasses a number of stages that range from the construction of public service network to the consolidation of a de facto government, as well as for the deployment of armed combat and the development of a platform from which to conduct operations against the enemy. The operational aspect of the territory is afforded more importance than the physical one within the context of a protracted war wherein the territory -and this is where we find

¹⁵ MOGHADAM, Assaf. “Palestinian Suicide Terrorism in the Second Intifada: Motivations and Organizational Aspects”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 26/2, 2003, p. 70. Concepts clarified by the author during an interview with Professor Avraham Sela at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 8 December 2013.

¹⁶ An example of such media treatment can be found in what has become known as the “Battle of Jenin”, which took place in April 2002 during Operation Defensive Shield, whereby initial statements by the Palestinian authorities spoke of the massacre of 3,000 civilians, the figure was later reduced to approximately five hundred and ultimately to fifty-two in the UN Investigation Report. See SCHIFF, Ze’ev. “Facts, Illusion and Strategy”, in HIRSCH and GOODMAN (Eds); “The Battle of Jenin: A Case Study in Israel’s Communication Strategy”, Tel Aviv: Jaffa Center for Strategic Studies, 2003, pp. 18-20, and the UNITED NATIONS. A/ES-10/186 Report of the Secretary-General prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution ES-10/10, p. 12 (paragraph 56).

similarities between this and the Maoist insurgency doctrine- may be lost and recovered, provided this does not restrict insurgent operational capabilities. While on the subject of operational considerations, it makes sense to clarify here a number of issues concerning religion and identity. Firstly, from a religious perspective, Palestine is considered *Dar al-Islam*, i.e., Muslim ground belonging to the *Ummah* but occupied by an infidel- Israel. Therefore, according to the Koran, the *Ummah* should be repaid after a long struggle *sine die* generation after generation. Based on this argument, Palestine is *waqf*, or a divine gift to devout Muslims, and is therefore inalienable and must be passed intact from generation to generation until the end of time.¹⁷ Secondly, and from the point of view of identity, this protracted war is built on the concept of the *fellah*, or peasant farmer, as a cultural reference symbolising the heroic war advocated by the *muqawama* doctrine, and based on two key elements: *sumud* (steadfastness) and *sabr* (patience).¹⁸ These are the basic qualities required of the agricultural labourer, which the *muqawama* doctrine has recovered to identify Palestine's role in the protracted war. It is a metaphor for the steadfastness required to grow crops in such a challenging land as Palestine and the patience needed to wait and see whether the land will bear fruit, with the perseverance required to confront a powerful enemy such as Israel and to ultimately defeat it, thanks to the steadfastness of the struggle of the Palestinian *Mujahid*, and despite the material and technological imbalance between the two sides.

- Bloodshed over maintenance of the territory. The aim is to cause as many casualties as possible to enemy troops. Consistent with how the doctrine envisages its own civilian population, the entire Israeli population is seen as combatant,¹⁹ and the goal therefore is to persecute the Israeli population in general by preventing it from taking the initiative and forcing it to respond reactively to the course of events. On this point, the extension of the territory as an insurgent base or area of operations (*vide infra*) is relegated to the background and the priority is to cause casualties; this becomes even more important when you consider the low level of tolerance that the Israeli society (and western societies in general) have of civilian casualties, in contrast to the *muqawama* doctrine which associates death in battle with martyrdom.

17 HROUB, Khaled. "Hamas. Political Thought and Practice". Washington DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000, pp. 69-70.

18 The subject of identity references in the armed struggle of Hamas is addressed in detail in the article by Doctor SINGH, Rashmi. "The discourse and practice of 'Heroic Resistance' in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the case of Hamas", *Politics, Religion and Ideology*, 13/4, 2006, pp. 529-545.

19 An example of this aspect of the doctrine would be the wave of suicide attacks on Israel between 1993 and 1996 and again during the Second Intifada (2000-2005). See KATZ, Samuel. "The Hunt for the Engineer: How Israeli Agents Tracked the Hamas Master Bomber", New York: Fromm International, 1999.

- The *jihad* and nationalism. Related to the subject of territory, we have the connection between the armed struggle and nationalism, and the re-articulation that the two concepts are subject to in the *muqawama* insurgency doctrine. Armed struggle is seen as part of the jihad or war against the infidel and, in the case of Palestine, as the recovery of a part of the *Ummah* occupied by a *kafir* or infidel like Israel. The nationalist issue is therefore contingent upon the religious one and upon the *muqawama* doctrine as a means of integrating a secular notion and, thus, one that is contrary to the teachings of Islam, which causes artificial and secular divisions of the *Ummah* within the religion of Islam where the unity of the territory is beyond question.

3. THE INSURGENT ACTOR: HAMAS

To understand why Hamas adopted the *muqawama* doctrine as a fighting strategy, we must go back to the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood of the 1970s which, based in Palestine, and mainly in the Gaza Strip, had to go into hiding in the 1940s, firstly because of the Egyptian ban and subsequently because of the Israeli occupation.²⁰ During the 1950s and '60s, the Muslim Brotherhood began to be structured around a local leader, Ahmad Yassin, a refugee from Ashkelon who was paralysed in an accident during his youth. This however did not prevent him from completing his studies, becoming an expert in Islamic Jurisprudence and earning the title of sheikh for his sermons in Gazan mosques.

Under Yassin's leadership, the Muslim Brotherhood began to organise itself in the 1970s. It built a network of mosques and social facilities which included nurseries, clinics and schools. These efforts culminated in 1976 with the foundation of the Islamic Center to coordinate all these activities, which even included the foundation of the Islamic University of Gaza with Israel's consent.²¹

The organisers of the movement continued to clandestinely gain followers, although it was not until the outbreak of the First Intifada in December 1987 that the need to equip the movement with military capability became a pressing one,²² both on account of the escalating tension with Israel and the emergence of rival Islamist groups, such

20 After the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the Gaza Strip came under the control of Egypt until it was taken over by Israel after the Six-Day War in 1967.

21 Israel initially authorised the development of the Palestinian Islamist Movement in the belief that it would act as a counterweight to the international rise of the PLO, draining it of internal support. MILTON-EDWARDS, Beverly. "Islamic politics in Palestine", London: I. B. Tauris, 1996, pp. 104-114.

22 CHEHAB, Zaki. "Inside Hamas", New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007, pp.22-23.

as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), which were involved in armed conflicts and began to win over the more radical followers of the Muslim Brotherhood. It was at this point that the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood set up the Islamic Resistance Movement, known by the acronym Hamas, and equipped itself with a fledgling armed unit called the *Majd* (glory) to persecute collaborators of the Israeli government.²³ However, it quickly attracted the attention of the Israeli authorities, which began to employ decapitation tactics against the movement's senior members and main activists. Paradoxically, from the earliest stages the new organisation showed great resilience to the former's counterinsurgent tactics and, time after time, replaced the leaders of the organisation as soon as the Israeli authorities had removed them, always under the direction of Sheikh Yassin, whether from his prison cell or as a free man.

In addition to the dynamic of removing or decapitating Hamas's political-military structure, Israel launched a new tactic that is often underestimated when analysing the case of Hamas and the development of the muqawama doctrine. We are referring to deportation - a tool used by Israel in disregard of international law - which consisted of capturing militants from the different groups that fought in the First Intifada and transporting them by bus to the demilitarised zone occupied by Israel in southern Lebanon. This is what happened to almost 415 senior and mid-level members of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in December 1992 when they were deported for almost a year to the mountainous area of southern Lebanon and denied entry to Israel. Despite the difficulties, however, the deported members were able to take advantage of the opportunity to operate in a space outside Israel's control, and this was extremely important for two reasons: firstly, the deported Hamas members came into contact with an armed group that was firmly established in the region, with whom they forged close ties; we are referring to Hezbollah, from whose insurgency doctrine Hamas adopted theoretical and practical ideas, political-military coordination procedures and new tactics such as suicide attacks and the use of tunnels.²⁴ And secondly, perhaps influenced by the example of Hezbollah and with the advantage of being able to hold meetings with members of Hamas living in the Gulf countries, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria in the camp in Marj al-Zuhur, which had been built by the deportees themselves, the deported Hamas leaders decided to subdivide the organisation so that it could continue to operate despite Israel's leadership decapitation tactics.²⁵ It was at this time that the leaders of Hamas were split into two political structures – one for the

23 *Majd* is an acronym for *Majmouath Jihad u-Dawa* (the Holy War or Sermonizing Group). See LEVITT, Matthew. "Hamas, politico, beneficencia y terrorismo al servicio de la yihad" (Hamas: politics, charity and terrorism in the service of Jihad), Barcelona: Editorial Norma, 2008, p. 31.

24 KATZ, op. cit., pp. 43-47.

25 TAMIMI, Azzam. "Hamas. A History from Within", Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2007, pp. 66-69.

interior, under the direction of Sheikh Yassin, and another for the exterior, known as the Political Bureau, under the leadership of Khaled Mashaal. In addition, there was the Majlis al-Shura (consultative council of the movement), comprised of prisoners to coordinate the actions and conduct of imprisoned Hamas members and, what is more important for the purpose of this article, the military arm – the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades – which, despite its full integration into the Hamas apparatus, enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy of operations,²⁶ thus ensuring that the organisation could carry out armed operations, even when the political leaders of Hamas had been forcibly removed by Israel.

Hamas and the Al-Qassam Brigades became the protagonists of the armed struggle during the period between Intifadas (1993-2000) in an attempt to boycott both the Oslo Accords and the institution of the Palestinian National Authority. The first suicide bombing by the Al-Qassam Brigades was carried out in 1994 in retaliation for an Israeli settler attacking devout Muslims as they prayed in the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron during the month of Ramadan. The practice of using suicide bombers continued for a decade, until the Second Intifada ended around 2004.

Finally, between 2005 and 2007, a series of events forced Hamas to readapt its fighting procedures. Firstly, in 2005, the Israeli government of Ariel Sharon unilaterally decided to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and dismantle its settlements and military bases there in an attempt to revive the peace process on his own terms.²⁷ However, the Israeli withdrawal was accompanied by the blockade of the Gaza Strip and its physical separation from the West Bank, thus making any kind of coordinated action between the two sections of Hamas impossible. This led the organisation, the central core of which remained in the Gaza Strip, to develop a new tactic based on the use of rockets, which we will discuss later on. Secondly, in another bid to revive the peace process, the Palestinian National Authority, under the government of Mahmud Abbas,²⁸ initiated parliamentary elections. For the first time in its history, Hamas had decided to take part in and ultimately won an election, which triggered a wave of violence between the organisation and al-Fatah, the party traditionally in power, which controlled the PNA institutions, including the oversized security forces, because it refused to hand over

26 Ibid, p. 164.

27 BYMAN, Daniel. "A High Price. The Triumphs and Failures of Israeli Counterinsurgency", Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 173-177.

28 Mahmud Abbas was Yasser Arafat's prime minister from March to October 2003, when he resigned from the post on account of disagreements with Arafat and his patronage style of government. Elected president of the Palestinian National Authority on the death of his predecessor, he began a brief process of opening up to democracy through local and parliamentary elections in 2005 and in January 2006, although his position as prime minister of the PNA government had not been validated by any democratic process. See JAMAL, Amal. "The Palestinian National Movement: Politics of Contention, 1967-2005", Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005, pp. 165-170.

power to Hamas. The chaos that ensued can be regarded as a civil war between the armed factions of the two movements, and resulted in the defeat and expulsion of a large part of the al-Fatah forces from the Gaza Strip and the seizure of the institutions by Hamas in 2007, which marked the start of an unstable period of government that was characterised by the reform of the security sector in Gaza under the authority of Hamas and a redefinition of its internal relations as a government and as an insurgent.²⁹

4. THE *MUQAWAMA* DOCTRINE IN THE ARMED STRUGGLE OF HAMAS

After this brief introduction to the *muqawama* doctrine and the main actor that follows it, we may ask ourselves how Hamas puts the theoretical foundations –the prelude to the political system it is aiming to implement in substitution of the State of Israel - into practice in the armed struggle. To accomplish this, we should look, on the one hand, at the classical structural elements of insurgency models, such as the political arena, the social bases and territory and, on the other, at the fighting procedures and their distinctive features in the case of Hamas.

4.1. Structural elements

The *muqawama* doctrine not only constitutes the body of guidelines for the fight against Israel, it is also the socio-political organisational model that the organisation intends to implement after the enemy invader has been defeated.

The political arena is one of the main areas where the pragmatism and adaptability preached by the *muqawama* doctrine is put into practice. This is what led the leaders of Hamas to take part in local elections in 2005 and to participate and ultimately win the Palestinian National Authority parliamentary elections a year later. Playing the democratic game is controversial among conservative Islamists, given that they only recognize the theocratic political system, and democracy is therefore seen as contrary to the will of Allah. Nevertheless, the emphasis that *muqawama* places on pragmatism was the tool that Hamas used to legitimize its participation in the elections with its social bases, and it presented itself as an adjustment mechanism that would enable the movement to control and redirect the PNA on the path of resistance against Israel.³⁰

29 INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP. “Ruling Palestine I: Gaza under Hamas”, Middle East Report no. 73, 2008.

30 BERTI, Benedetta. “Armed Political Organizations: from Conflict to Integration”. Baltimore:

Also stemming from the need for pragmatism that the *muqawama* doctrine preaches is the use of the *hudna* and the *tahdiya* (*vide supra*) in the conflict with Israel. Based on these, the *muqawama* doctrine recognizes two elements: firstly, an all-out war until Palestine has been fully recovered as *waqf* for the *Ummah* and, secondly, that the protracted struggle may be suspended at the agreement of the parties and a temporary truce used to recover their strength and to rearm; this truce would also allow adaptation and technological innovation, given that this is difficult to achieve during periods of conflict.³¹

Hamas has therefore declared several *hudnas* with Israel, which have resulted in relative ceasefires between the three major armed conflicts of December 2008-January 2009, November 2012 and July and August 2014.

Nevertheless, in the political arena, one of the most interesting aspects of the pragmatism advocated by the *muqawama* doctrine is the reconciliation of the armed struggle with Hamas's role as a *de facto* government in the Gaza Strip. Following the civil war between Hamas and the al-Fatah government in the Gaza strip in June 2007, Hamas had to assume its role as a government and focus a large part of its efforts on the administrative management of a blockaded Gaza and, most especially, on the reform of the security sector during a situation of absolute internal chaos. Despite the limited human and material resources that were devoted to the aforementioned reform, it can nevertheless be described as a success, and won major support and, hence, legitimacy for Hamas from the Gazan population during that period.³²

But how did the movement reconcile government action with the very restrictions this poses for international relations with like-minded countries such as Egypt and Qatar? And how was it able to guarantee a stable environment in which to provide the services expected of a legal government with the need to relentlessly pursue the armed struggle advocated by the *muqawama* doctrine and demanded by the more radical factions of the movement as an element of cohesion?

These conflicting roles have largely been resolved by drawing a distinction between Hamas/government and Hamas/resistance fighter, although this has revealed many grey areas when analyzed in-depth. While the Gazan security forces remain separate from and independent of the Al-Qassam Brigades,³³ it is a fact that duplications exist and that during periods of conflict, officers of the security forces have acted under the

John Hopkins University Press, 2013, pp. 95-104.

31 LITVAK, Meir. "Martyrdom is Life": Jihad and Martyrdom in the Ideology of Hamas", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 33/8, 2010, p. 728.

32 SAYIGH, Yezid. "We serve the people": Hamas policing in Gaza", *Crown Center for Middle East Studies*, Crown paper number 5, Brandeis University, 2011, pp. 47-65.

33 Interview by the author with the Vice Dean of the Gaza Police Academy, Dr. Ibrahim Habib, Gaza city, 16 January 2014.

command of the Al-Qassam Brigades, which have largely performed the role of armed forces within the security architecture of the Hamas government.³⁴

The social arena is the second element that we should pause to examine. Hamas has consistently preached the *Dawah* doctrine, a legacy of the Muslim Brotherhood that advocates the recovery of Islam through education and the study of religion. As mentioned previously, since the 1970s the Muslim Brotherhood, and later Hamas, have devoted a large part of their efforts to building and developing an extensive and efficient network of public services and this enabled them, more than any other group present in the Gaza Strip, to win the support of their social bases.

As a result, Hamas has been able to use its social bases in the armed struggle against Israel in two ways: firstly, Hamas has managed to exploit its social bases as part of its offensive strategy; which is why the organisation was able to commit numerous suicide bombings between 1994 and 2005 and, on this point, we must not only take account of the radicalization factor, but also the social bases' loyalty to the provider of public services and guarantees for the families' of the martyrs.³⁵ And secondly, Hamas has been equally successful at capitalizing on its social bases and making them part of its defence strategy through what has been dubbed "the victimhood doctrine",³⁶ which places the civilian population somewhere between the combatant population and a propaganda tool. Based on what we said earlier about all Palestinian Muslims being called upon by the *muqawama* doctrine to be involved in the armed struggle against the enemy invader, it can be concluded that, according to these theoretical principles, the difference within the organisation between the civilian and combatant population is blurred, although international public opinion draws a clear distinction between the two. The "victimhood doctrine", in short, explains the mechanism used by Hamas to earn it legitimacy within the organisation for the massacre of its social bases by Israeli bombings of entire neighbourhoods, including schools, hospitals and mosques. This is what happened in the Shuja'iya district of Gaza city in the summer of 2014, without the social base feeling alienated from the movement they support, and allowing Hamas to portray massacres like this one as an attack on the civilian population to the international community.

34 ICC. Mounting evidence indicates that during Operation Cast Lead (and in ordinary times) members of Hamas's internal security forces served as commanders and operatives in Hamas's military wing (Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades), 2009.

35 MOGHADAM. Op. Cit., p. 72; HAFEZ, Mohammed. "Manufacturing Human Bombs. The Making of Palestinian Suicide Bombers", Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2006, pp. 33-37 and 43-46.

36 Term coined by SIBONI, Gabi. "Operations Cast Lead, Pillar of Defense, and Protective Edge: a Comparative Review". Tel Aviv: INSS, p. 31.

Finally, we should mention how the *muqawama* doctrine has been used to contain social instability in the Gaza Strip. In the aftermath of the heated riots of 2007, various jihadist groups began to emerge in the area, whose ideology was closer to the general ideology of al-Qaeda than the local one of Hamas,³⁷ in addition to traditional but more radical groups than Hamas, where fighting is concerned, such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Splitting into Hamas the political movement, to accommodate its government role, and Hamas/Al-Qassam Brigades the military wing, to accommodate its role as an insurgent organisation, has allowed Hamas to continue to carry out controlled armed activities and thus continue its armed resistance, while at the same time create institutions to coordinate actions with other factions, such as the Muqawama Council, which coordinates armed campaigns and implements truces. Accordingly, the Hamas government has used enforcement mechanisms to minimize the impact of these Jihadist groups,³⁸ and by continuing the armed struggle, it has denied them the right to accuse Hamas of neglecting its sacred obligation of resistance to Israel.

The third structural element to consider is territory, with its dual function as a secure base and an area of operations. Ironically, Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 and the civil war against al-Fatah in 2007 gave Hamas almost complete control over the Gaza Strip but isolated it from Israel, which sealed off Gaza, and the international community, which withdrew -save exceptions such as Syria, Iran and later Qatar and Egypt- its support and funding for the Hamas de facto government. This situation of isolation also had an impact on the definition of the territory in terms of the parameters of the armed struggle.

This dual view of the territory as an area of operations and a secure base formed the basis of some of the main strategies implemented by Hamas, specifically, and initially, during the wave of suicide bombings between 1994 and 1996 and the Second Intifada (2000-2005).³⁹ These were mainly perpetrated on Israeli ground which, let us not forget, in Hamas's opinion, belonged in its entirety to Palestine (Dar al-Islam) and

37 INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP. "Radical Islam in Gaza", Middle East Report, no. 104, 2011.

38 An example of this were the riots and the assassination of the leader of Jund Ansar Allah in Rafah in June 2009. AL-JAZEERA. حفر بطل راصنا دنج مي عز لتقم [Leader of Jund Ansar Allah killed in Rafah], 15 August 2009.

39 Contrary to what happened with the First Intifada, which is deemed to have ended in 1993 with the signing of the Oslo Accords between the PLO and Israel, there is no exact date for the conclusion of the Second Intifada. That said, from the perspective of the use of violence by the two enemies, 2005 would probably be a likely date, as it was the year in which Israel commenced the construction of the wall around the West Bank and, of even more relevance to this article, the year of the unilateral withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip and the subsequent blockade. Both measures resulted in a virtual suspension of violence by the different Palestinian insurgent groups and, most especially, the abandonment -largely on account of their being physically incapable- of the use of suicide terrorism.

were intended to prevent occupant Israeli forces from controlling security. In addition, and especially during the wars of 2008-2009 and 2014, when the Al-Qassam Brigades tried to create rocket attacks of such an intensity that Israel was forced to intervene in Gaza with its ground forces, thus luring the enemy into densely populated and unfamiliar hostile territory, after the traumatic experience of the Battle of Jenin in the Jenin refugee camp in 2002.⁴⁰ Hamas's unsuccessful operations in the two Gaza wars that involved an invasion by Israeli ground forces was based on the division of the land into three concentric circles: the first and outer circle was protected with explosives, mortar shells and landmines; the second, middle circle contained the outskirts of towns and was protected with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and snipers, and the innermost circle, comprising the largest towns, and especially Gaza, was protected by a network of tunnels (*vide supra*) with IEDs, buildings containing explosives, ambushes and snipers, in a bid to force the Israeli troops to fight in an urban environment that would prove very difficult because it was unfamiliar and hostile, and was also extremely challenging from the point of view of operations and the protection of the civilian population.⁴¹

4.2. Fighting procedures: asymmetry as a weapon

The *muqawama* doctrine advocates the use of asymmetric warfare between belligerents, thus taking advantage of the enemy's weaknesses and being able to adapt in order to exploit any vulnerability that might emerge. It was this ability to adapt that first led to the exploitation of the Israelis' terror of losing civilian lives in what have become known as "martyr operations" or suicide bombings, which were probably first used during the deportations to Lebanon in 1992, and which, as pointed out earlier, were Hamas's main fighting tactic between 1994 and 2005. However, the organisation was forced to readapt on account of three counterinsurgency actions taken by Israel: Operation Defensive Shield in April 2002, which was an attempt to stop terrorist attacks in the West Bank; the construction of a wall to separate the West Bank and Israel in spring 2005 and Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in August

⁴⁰ Operation Defensive Shield (April 2002) in Jenin refugee camp was the first time the united effort of Palestinian forces was put to the test (bearing in mind that Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the militias of al-Fatah, Tanzim and the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades all fought in a coordinated manner). It was also the first time the Israeli army found itself fighting in densely populated areas and in an urban environment inside Palestine. During the battle, Palestinian insurgent groups, and especially Hamas, made ample use of IEDs on roads, houses, furniture and vehicles to attract the attention of the Israeli forces and then detonated them in their path. In BYMAN. Op. Cit., 146.

⁴¹ COHEN, Yoram; WHITE, Jeffrey. "Hamas in Combat", Policy Focus no. 97, October 2009, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2009, p. 11.

that same year; these reduced the possibility of suicide bombers entering Israel to a minimum and forced Hamas to look for new offence tactics. In response to these changes in the fighting arena, high trajectory weapons such as rockets and mortars began to be used during the Second Intifada and their use has become more and more widespread since 2007.⁴² The Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis played a key role in the development of these capabilities. Over the last few decades, Iran has been smuggling a large number of Grad-type rockets and components thereof for subsequent assembly in local Gazan workshops⁴³ across the Sinai Peninsula and through the Rafah tunnels. More importantly, however, has been the training received by Hamas forces on how to operate, manufacture and handle the rockets in camps in the Lebanon managed by Hezbollah, Syria and Iran. Such courses typically lasted between six and twenty-four weeks⁴⁴, and Hamas and the Al-Qassam Brigades were able to reproduce the training system on their own in the Gaza Strip later on.

Indeed, it is in the “rocket war” that we can find some of the main elements of the *muqawama* doctrine. Firstly, based on its structure and fighting procedures, it makes sense to ask ourselves whether Hamas is waging a guerrilla or terrorist warfare, both, or neither of the two. The most plausible response would be both. Hamas has structured its forces – the Al-Qassam Brigades – into divisions, brigades, companies, sections and units which, although far smaller in number than their Western counterparts, nevertheless provide a regular command chain comparable to the guerrilla units in the balance of forces stage.⁴⁵ In the case of Hamas and the *muqawama* doctrine, however, the aim is to achieve the opposite, i.e., to exploit this imbalance by forcing the enemy to participate in a non-conventional type of warfare that entails an element of surprise, that catches the enemy off guard, a tactic that Yoram Schweitzer has dubbed “terrorilla”⁴⁶ because of the combination of guerrilla warfare, terrorism, ambushing and the use of IEDs and mined buildings against the Israeli ground forces in Gaza. Secondly, the type of weapons that the Islamic Resistance Movement has primarily been using over the past decade is not what you would expect of a terrorist organisation, but rather of a guerrilla group and even, in the most advanced cases, of regular artillery units on account of their calibre, firepower and range.⁴⁷ However, the use made of these

42 IICC. “Rocket Threat from the Gaza Strip”, 2000-2007. December 2007.

43 See note 48 for an example of Iran’s role in the development of a local rocket industry in Gaza.

44 COLVIN, Marie. “Hamas Wages Iran’s Proxy War on Israel”. *The Sunday Times*, 9 March 2009.

45 COHEN and WHITE. *Op. Cit.*, p. 9.

46 SCHWEITZER, Yoram. “The Limitations of Fighting a Terrorilla Army: Lebanon and Gaza as Test Cases”, *Military and Strategic Affairs*, 1/1, pp. 35-46; SCHWEITZER, Yoram. “Defining the Victor in the Fight against an Army of “Terrorilla”, Tel Aviv: INSS, 2014, pp. 21-26.

47 On this point, because of its capabilities, Hamas is beginning to resemble more and more the model that Frank Hoffman describes as “hybrid warfare”, in HOFFMAN, Frank. “Hybrid Threats: Neither Omnipotent Nor Unbeatable”, in *Orbis*, 54/3, 2010, pp. 441-455.

weapons has been dictated by an imperative of the fighting ecosystem such as the blockade of the Gaza Strip and has created an operational imbalance with Israel and raised questions about Hamas's insurgent nature on account of its fighting procedure, given that rockets have been used as a terrorist tactic and their core strength does not lie in their lethality (which is very limited because they do not have guidance systems), but rather in their ability to terrorise the Israeli civilian population. Indeed, between 2009 and 2014 Israeli civilians became more and more fearful of rocket attacks, as Hamas and other insurgent groups, particularly the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, expanded the rockets' technical capabilities and, more especially, their range, so that they now pose a threat to cities such as Tel Aviv and Haifa in the north of Israel and more than 75 kilometres from Gaza,⁴⁸ as well as vital infrastructures not protected by the Iron Dome,⁴⁹ such as the Dimona nuclear power plant.⁵⁰

Another system based on the idea of adaptation to the environment is the one that Perel and Shapir call "subterranean warfare".⁵¹ The construction of tunnels was probably a direct legacy of the relationship between Hamas and Hezbollah, who developed and used, for military purposes, an extensive network of underground constructions in its clashes with Israel, especially during the Second Lebanon War in the summer of 2006. Hamas's first noteworthy armed activity in tunnels in the Gaza Strip also dates back to 2006, when 19-year-old soldier Gilad Shalit was kidnapped until October 2011. The use of tunnels was common on the border with Egypt and

48 Hamas's arms industry has mainly focused on the production of its own rocket -the Qassam- of which three models have been produced, with each successive model representing an improvement over the previous one in terms of range and firepower. The first one, the Qassam 1, had a range of approximately five kilometers and the latest one, the Qassam 3, around twelve kilometers. In addition, it has an arsenal of 107-mm rockets manufactured in China and Iran; the traditional Grad and Katyusha rockets that had previously been used extensively by Hezbollah, with an approximate range of forty kilometers and, finally, the Iranian Fajr-5 and the homemade version -the M-75- with a range of around 75 kilometers. In 2014, Hamas added to its arsenal the Syrian manufactured M-302 which has a range of almost 160 km according to Israeli sources, in addition to its homemade version -the R-160. The organisation has continued to develop its arsenal, as evidenced by the presentation in twitter by the Al-Qassam Brigades of a new rocket model the "Qassam ??"- the range of which has not been specified but which we can assume is greater than those already in existence, on 14 December 2014 to commemorate the 27th anniversary of the founding of the Movement. ELDAR, Shlomi. "Hamas official confirms Qassam rocket tests", al-Monitor, 17 December 2014.

49 The Iron Dome is a CRAM (Counter Rocket Artillery Mortar) system that uses a radar system to detect and intercept rockets and then activates a counter rocket defense system that destroys the rockets in mid-air, provided their trajectory poses a direct threat to populated Israeli areas.

50 On 9 July 2014 Hamas launched three M-75 rockets in the direction of Dimona nuclear power plant, but none hit its target. In FUENTE, Ignacio. "La Operación "Margen Protector" y la Defensa Antimisil de Israel", Madrid: IEEE, 2014, p. 9.

51 PEREL, Gal; SHAPIR, Yiftah. "Subterranean Warfare: a New-Old Challenge", Tel Aviv: INSS, 2014, pp. 51-57.

they were mainly used for smuggling, demonstrating that the technology needed had been tested and was ready for deployment. And it began to be used for offensive purposes (the kidnapping of Shalit), as well as defensive ones. Hence, tunnels became extremely important during the first two Gaza Wars -December 2008 January 2009 and November 2012- to enable the Al-Qassam Brigades' troops to move from one battleground to another, inadvertently reach the enclaves of rocket launchers, connect mined buildings or snipers with military barracks, and to provide a safe haven for the movement's political leaders who were constantly under the threat of Israeli targeted killings.⁵² However, the war of 2014 saw a revival of the use of tunnels for offensive purposes. During the almost fifty days that the war lasted, the Israeli army blew up thirty tunnels that crossed beneath the wall of the West Bank and deep into Israeli territory, probably intended to facilitate the entry of groups intending to carry out attacks or kidnappings.⁵³

Finally, we must mention Hamas's success in capitalising on the three conflicts with Israel -2008, 2009, 2012 and 2014- and portraying them as victories to its social bases and in keeping with the *muqawama* military doctrine. In all three cases, Hamas hailed itself the victor because it had made it impossible for the enemy -Israel- to achieve its objectives and maintained some of its military capabilities so that it could continue the armed struggle after a brief period of *tahdia* that was used for rearmament. Israel's military goals were also based on an operative concept of "victory", which was confined to recovering its dissuasive power over Hamas so that it could guarantee its civilian population around the Gaza Strip in southern Israel a safe environment. Not only was this not achieved in its entirety during the three conflicts, it has also been impossible to completely destroy Hamas, largely because of the configuration of the environment in which the latter forced Israel to fight, either from the air, with less precision, or on the ground, with the obvious risk of military casualties that this entails, and its likely impact on public opinion and support. Hamas hails these conflicts a victory because subsequent events have shown that its arsenal and the morale of its social bases have allowed it to continue the armed struggle after taking some time to recover its strength; indeed, it has even enhanced its military capabilities with longer-range state-of-the-art rockets. Therefore, and this is vital for its legitimacy, while Israel can only sell a military victory and the achievement of some of its objectives to public opinion, Hamas has been able to keep its legitimacy intact, by merely keeping its resistance capability intact. The success of this self-proclaimed victory is evidenced by the celebrations in the Gaza Strip following the signing of the ceasefire on 26 August 2014, which was

52 There have been multiple cases of targeted killings of Hamas leaders, the most important being those of Sheikh Yassin, Dr. Rantissi and Salah Shehade. In 2012, despite the security measures taken and the system of tunnels used for hiding, Israel managed to assassinate Ahmed Jabari, commander of the Al-Qassam Brigades. While this constituted a huge setback for the organisation, it soon managed to capitalize on the incident to portray Jabari as a martyr for the cause and hero of the resistance.

53 CIRALSKY, Adam. "Did Israel Avert a Hamas Massacre?" Vanity Fair, 21 October 2014.

confirmed – in terms of legitimacy and in accordance with the *muqawama* doctrine – in December that year, when the Al-Qassam Brigades presented, via its twitter account, a new rocket model by the name “Qassam?”, without specifying its range or firepower, but which is presumably of a longer range than previous models (see note 47).

5. FINAL REMARKS

As we have seen from the previous sections, Hamas’s political and armed activities, especially in the Gaza Strip, are prompted by the theoretical guidelines of the *muqawama* doctrine, which began to be implemented by the movement in the 1990s when the organisation’s military action began to be afforded the same importance as its social one. The first and most obvious consequence of adopting this doctrine is that Israel has been forced to readapt its traditional counterinsurgency strategies over the past two decades in order to be able to deal with the threat that Hamas poses for Israeli national security.

Despite the criticism that Hamas has received in the global Jihadist arena, its impact as a protracted and to-date ineradicable resistance force suggests that conservative Sunni Islam is quickly on the rise throughout the region, and it is quite possible that the *muqawama* doctrine will be imported by other groups and readapted to their territories as necessary. The risk, aside from the military one and the use of certain fighting tactics, is based on an identity and mental structure that is different from the classical elements that states such as Israel have been confronting since the 1960s in the form of guerrilla warfare and terrorism. Radicalized Arab and Muslim components have redefined combat parameters which are key in armed confrontation, such as the concept of victory, defeat, peace and resistance and, therefore, should be reconsidered in order to be able to act on them.

Without wishing to be alarmist or, for that matter, to underestimate the lessons learned during more than half a century of contemporary counterinsurgency, it is vital to readapt these strategies, procedures, techniques and tactics to the new models that are emerging, of which the *muqawama* doctrine is merely one example. And for this re-adaptation to be effective, it is not only necessary to be familiar with the territory and culture in which the insurgency model developed (in hearts in minds), but also to assess how the identity values are conveyed in a fighting procedure that is legitimated and supported by a social base that implements it as if it were its own strategy for escaping from an injurious situation. Because, let us not forget that in armed conflict, despite the fierce radicalism of the discourse, it is normally bullets that claim lives and, for counterinsurgency purposes, it is vital to render both the weapons, and the discourse that fuels them, harmless.

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