

## **The Politics of Representation on Social Media: The Case of Hamas during the 2014 Israel–Gaza Conflict**

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### **Abstract**

Alongside the military confrontation that took place in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip in July and August 2014, a battle in the media sector was also underway. This study focuses on the agenda of Hamas during different stages of the psychological war between the two sides involved, namely itself and the Israeli government. By selecting texts and images from two Hamas-affiliated Arabic social media accounts respectively, the study applies grounded theory to inspect the themes of Hamas's political marketing and tracks the evolution of the themes in terms of time and frequency by cross-referencing events on the timeline. It also explores how the themes interacted and co-evolved with local and international attitudes towards the Gaza Conflict.

**Keywords:** Hamas, Israel, Gaza, media, political communication, propaganda

### **Introduction**

Military confrontation is hardly the only battlefield in modern war. More and more non-military players evolve into crucial forces in determining the end result of the game. As the channels multiply in the age of the Internet, complete information blockade becomes neither likely to be completely achieved nor justified. During a conflict, it is particularly important to select and transmit the right message at the best time: winning support and sympathy domestically and internationally, and weakening the other side.

The power of media in a mediated world has been discussed extensively since the 1990s: Refraction of media in international communication. (W.A. & H. Hachten 1992) media and foreign policy, (P.M. Taylor 1997) news as a “politics of illusion” in the changing information system, (Bennett 1996) etc. Political movements make their attempts on the new media platform for four main goals: Mobilizing supporters, having their messages featured in traditional media which can reach a wider audience, influencing public opinion getting sympathy from people, and making an impact on politics. (Wolfsfeld 2011, 17)

In the event of a conflict, the engaging parties are faced with the issues of legitimacy and reputation management. Benoit's theory of image restoration offers a set of five

communication strategies: Denial (simple denial or shift of blame), evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of events (including attacking accuser and reimbursing victim), corrective action (plan to solve or prevent problem), and mortification (apology). These could be used individually or in combination to respond to a crisis. (1997) Coombs has a similar model of seven strategies: attacking the accuser, denial, excuse, justification, ingratiation, corrective action, and apology. (1999) Avraham proposes a new model: analysing the crisis and target audience, selecting the suitable media strategy, and delivering the campaign via several techniques and channels. (2004; 2013) In terms of delivering the message, whether it is by propaganda, psychological operations, or political marketing, the aim is essentially the same: “To achieve political goals by way of psychological persuasion.” (Schleifer, 2014)

The Gaza War of 2008-09 was covered intensively by the media. Both Israel and Hamas used numerous propaganda practices via multiple channels to appeal to their audience, to the extent that the fighting over cybersphere became “war 2.0.”<sup>1</sup> Wartime news are often played out by the protagonist entities on the arenas of home front, opponent, and international level following three distinct types of “scripts”: Power, vulnerability, and disaster. (Blondheim & Shifman 2009) Hamas’s wartime psychological operations could be “characterized as completely emotional.” Israel’s excuses seemed feeble in front of pictures depicting the damage done to Palestinian civilians, which were archetypal in Hamas’s visual campaign in an asymmetric war. Hamas was also fruitful on their opponent’s arena in arousing guilt among enemy soldiers. (Zeitsoff 2009; Schleifer 2014)

The 2008 war also coincided with the rise of citizen journalism. Individual bloggers and social media became the most convenient news reporter, and started to feed traditional media with content. (Hamdy 2010) There has been considerable number of research following the emergence of this new trend, which analysed data on social media and video websites from various angles, ranging from identity presentation and biased media coverage, conflict dynamics, dissemination patterns, transparency, to visual propaganda. (Najjar 2010; Zeitsoff 2011; Heemsbergen & Lindgren 2014; Seo 2014)

This study aims to understand the image Hamas tried to present during the 50-day conflict in 2014, in which Hamas attempted to exhaust Israeli civilians psychologically, whereas Israel aimed to ravage Hamas’s military capabilities. (Eitan Shamir & Eado Hecht 2014) It also seeks to trace how the movement reacted to the emerging new incidents and the constantly-changing battlefield situation. By examining how one channel during a certain event can strategically spread information and guide public opinion via media distribution, the study assesses the impact of media in conflict.

The most important and thought-provoking outcome of this study is that it evaluates the weight of the political marketing battle alongside regular military confrontation. In the light of calls for outside attention and support, the approaches launched to gain sympathy

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<sup>1</sup> “On the front line of Gaza’s war 2.0” Jan 10, 2009  
<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/on-the-front-lines-of-gaza-s-war-2-0-1.1233458>

provide an ideal repository for studying non-military measures in conflict situations. It may also help observers predict the next stage of similar situations, and provide party leaders with possible ways to seize the “moral high ground” and improve their public image when they are in a disadvantaged situation.

### **2014 Gaza Conflict: A Review**

The Israeli-Gaza conflict of 2014 was a military operation launched by Israel on the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip from July 8 to August 26. Three Israeli teenagers went missing on June 12<sup>2</sup>, and were later found to have been abducted and murdered by Hamas members, though Hamas’s “official” involvement as an entity was in doubt. This marked the prelude to a conflict which saw 2324 lives lost,<sup>3</sup> tens of thousands wounded—an overwhelming majority of them Gazans<sup>4</sup>—the heaviest toll of Palestinian civilian casualties since 1967.

Based on strategic goals and the types of troops involved, the conflict could be broadly divided into four phases:

- **Phase zero: ferment and mobilization (June 12 - July 7)**

Israel blamed Hamas for the abduction, and immediately launched a large-scale crackdown of “terrorist” infrastructure and personnel in the West Bank alleged to belong to Hamas.<sup>5</sup> It also conducted air strikes in the Gaza Strip. Hamas fought back by firing rockets from Gaza.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the Israeli government had been deliberately withholding the information concerning the teenagers’ death until June 30,<sup>8</sup> deceiving the public to believe that they were still alive awaiting to be rescued.<sup>9</sup> This misconception led to massive shock and anti-Arab turmoil when the bodies were found. On July 2, (i.e. a day after the burial of the three Israeli teenagers murdered) a 16-year-old Palestinian, Mohammed Abu Khdeir,<sup>10</sup> was kidnapped and murdered by Israeli settlers<sup>11</sup> in East Jerusalem. This further

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<sup>2</sup> All dates refer to 2014 unless otherwise identified

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Human Rights Committee report, March 2015

Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Health Minister of the Gaza Strip had different figures, ranging between 2198 and 2383 (numbers include deaths from both sides)

<sup>4</sup> Israel bore the death of 67 soldiers and 6 civilians

<sup>5</sup> “Israel rounds up senior Hamas men in West Bank sweep” June 15

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-rounds-up-senior-hamas-men-in-the-west-bank/>

<sup>6</sup> “IDF Seizes Hundreds of Weapons in Nablus, as Operation ‘Brother’s Keeper’ Enters 5th Day” June 17

<http://www.algemeiner.com/2014/06/17/idf-seizes-hundreds-of-weapons-in-nablus-as-operation-brother%E2%80%99s-keeper-enters-5th-day-video/>

<sup>7</sup> “Failure in Gaza” September 25

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/09/25/failure-gaza/>

<sup>8</sup> “Was Israeli public misled on abductions?” July 3

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/misleading-kidnapping-almoz-hamas-vengeance-hatred.html>

<sup>9</sup> “How the Public Was Manipulated into Believing the Kidnapped Israeli Teens Were Alive” July 2

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/how-the-public-was-manipulated-into-believing-the-kidnapped-israeli-teens-were-alive/5390448>

<sup>10</sup> “Palestinian boy Mohammed Abu Khdeir was burned alive, says official” July 5

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/05/palestinian-boy-mohammed-abu-khdeir-burned-alive>

<sup>11</sup> “Two Israelis jailed for burning Palestinian teenager Mohammed Abu Khdeir alive” Feb 4, 2016

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/12140169/Two-Israelis-jailed-for-burning-Palestinian-teenager-Muhammad-Abu-Khdeir-alive.html>

triggered revenge from the Arab side. Multiple confrontations were taking place in numerous areas.

- **Phase one: Israeli air strikes (July 8 - July 16)**

On July 8, the IDF announced an official military operation, shelling and launching air strikes on targets in the Gaza Strip, and Hamas continued to fight back with rockets. Egypt proposed a ceasefire on July 14, with the support of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, which was accepted by Israel but rejected by Hamas.

- **Phase two: ground forces involved (July 17 - August 2)**

The IDF ground troops were deployed after a five-hour humanitarian ceasefire proposed by the UN, targeting specifically the tunnel system which connected Gaza across Israeli borders. On August 1, the two sides announced a ceasefire for 72 hours under the mediation of the UN and the US, but soon accused each other of violating the ceasefire agreement.

- **Phase three: the gradual withdrawal of the Israeli army to achieve ceasefire (August 3 - August 26)**

On August 3, the IDF announced the completion of the destruction of most of the tunnels and withdrew most of its ground forces from the Gaza Strip. Peace talks were in place since then. They agreed on short temporary ceasefires while disputes were reported. A phased ceasefire agreement was reached on August 26, which marked the end of the conflict.

Both sides claimed to have won this war. Israel declared that Hamas was severely weakened, while Hamas celebrated “the victory of Gaza.”<sup>12</sup>

## **Research Design**

Hamas operates a number of social media accounts in different languages. This study mainly focuses on two elements of posts: texts and images. Existing research results based on print media in the 2008-2009 crisis show that Israel’s message was more conveyed in written text, while the Palestinian civilian perspective was prominently featured by images. (Dobernig & Lobinger 2010)

Previous studies have made the assumption that Hamas devoted effort to damage Israel’s image in the event of the crisis. (Mozes-Sadeh & Avraham 2014) This study applies the grounded theory, which principally means generating theory to explain the interactions, rather than coming up with a hypothesis first then verifying it with a set of data. (Corbin & Strauss 2014; Charmaz 2014) Similar approaches have been used to analyse Twitter images posted by IDF and Al-Qassam Brigades during the 2012 Gaza conflict, where the author reached the conclusion that “resistance” and “unity” were highlighted the most on

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<sup>12</sup> “Israel and Palestinians Reach Open-Ended Cease-Fire Deal” August 26  
<http://time.com/3182848/israel-gaza-ceasefire-abbas-netanyahu/>

IDF's part, while the largest proportion of Hamas's posts fell into civilian casualties. (Seo 2014)

In this analysis, texts are drawn from the official Hamas Twitter account in Arabic “حركة حماس” (@hamasinfo), which generally reprinted news links with a brief summary. Another account, “غزة الآن” (@gazapl), serves as the object of image studies. It was extensively active during the conflict and published a large number of photographs, comics and statistical charts, using hashtags such as #غزة\_تحت\_القصف (Gaza under bombardment), #GazaUnderAttack or #غزة\_تقاوم (Gaza resistance).

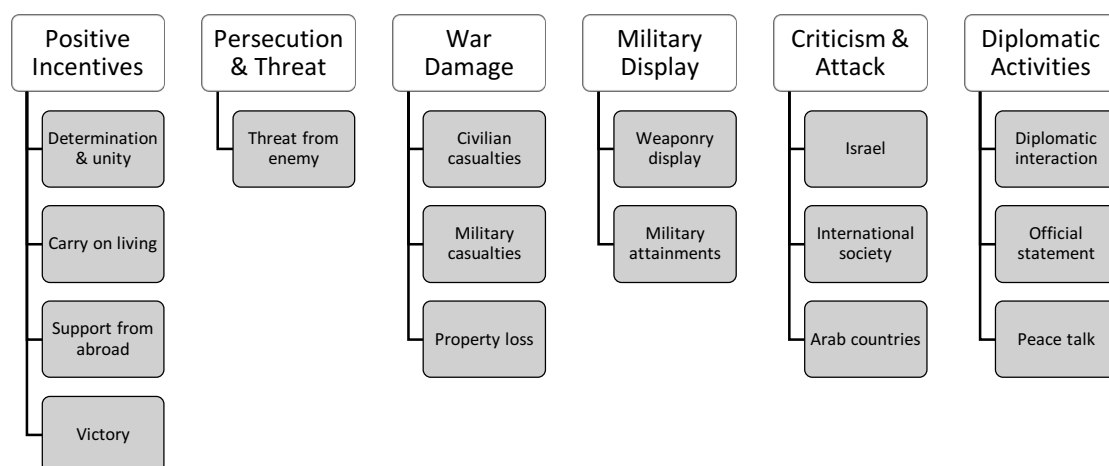
The period of study falls between the kidnapping on June 12 and August 27, the day after the ceasefire agreement. Media analysis covers the graphics both prior to and during the conflict.

Here, the researcher first codes the texts and pictures by all relevant themes inferred within the context, then organises the codes by merging similar or closely connected themes, defining one dominant theme per piece of data. The coding is subject to slight adjustment after cross-matching the two datasets of text and image. The group of pictures published in the same tweet usually share the same or similar theme, are therefore counted as one piece. Repeated tweets only count once. The researcher also counts the frequency of occurrence of different themes and their evolution through time.

## Analysis

### A. Coding

There are six notable themes featured throughout the posts. Every single entry of data falls under one of these themes: **positive incentives, persecution and threat, war damage, military display, criticism and attack, and diplomatic activities.**



The code “positive incentives” has four main manifestations. The determination of resistance is shown in official announcement, posters and T-shirts with resistance slogans, and comics. It also includes a number of texts that call for unity—sometimes these refer to the people of Gaza and the West Bank, sometimes they include the Hamas counterpart

Fatah, and other Arab nations. A key theme that is highlighted later in the conflict is new hope or the wish to carry on living. Typical posts that fall into this category are usually associated with babies or children, depicting a young mother lifting her baby with debris in the background, or telling stories about a girl who survived the bombardment and carried on going to school, or couples getting married in the wreckage of their mansion. In addition, some posts show support from abroad, no matter if it is a poster in Belgium, or a parade in Aleppo. Victory celebrations emerge after the ceasefire agreement has been achieved.

“Persecution and threat” does not only refer to the persecution directly from the Israeli authority, but also the danger under which Palestinians lived. This may include residents arrested by Israeli police in Hebron, Palestinian houses set alight by settlers, Arab killed by Jewish settlers, and IDF air raid which cut through the quiet night.

“War damage” has three aspects: civilian casualties, property loss, and military casualties.

“Military display” contains weaponry demonstrations that show off either Hamas’s newly home-made weapons or militants in combat positions; and their attainments, namely Israeli facilities hit by rockets, explosions outside synagogues, seized IDF vehicles and captives.

As for “criticism and attack,” there are comments against Israel, in addition to accusations directed at international society in general, particularly against the United States for accepting the IDF massacres and negatively interfering in the peace talk. There is also a notable number of posts criticising other Arab countries – attacking them for betrayal of the just cause and their indifference to the sufferings of the Gazan people and complaints about the poor quality of food aid coming from Egypt. “Diplomatic activities” refer to diplomatic negotiations and interactions, official statements, and peace talks during the conflict.

## B. Texts

Positive incentives	48	37.80%	Determination & unity	39	30.71%
			Support from abroad	3	2.36%
			Victory	6	4.72%
Persecution & threat	15	11.81%	Threat from the enemy	15	11.81%
War damage	5	3.94%	Military casualties	5	3.94%
Military display	12	9.45%	Weaponry display	7	5.51%
			Military attainments	5	3.94%
Criticism & attack	21	16.54%	Israel	19	14.96%
			International society	2	1.57%
Diplomatic activities	26	20.47%	Diplomatic interaction	7	5.51%
			Official statement	12	9.45%
			Peace talk	7	5.51%
			Sum	127	100.00%

Table 1 @hamasinfo

As shown in Table 1, amongst the 127 tweets posted by @hamasinfo between June 12 and Aug 27, the largest part (37.8%) was made up of positive incentives, calling for integrity and resistance.

This theme was seen continuously throughout the conflict, with some posts deliberately using the tag “Gaza Resistance” (#غزة\_تقاوم) to mark their agenda. But the wording and focus gradually changed, particularly after certain events. In the early stage of the conflict, as small-scale confrontations were taking place in local areas, the posts mainly addressed the determination to fight. Hamas introduced the goal of the whole struggle on July 13, making clear their appeal and conditions. It called on followers not to give up resistance unless demands were fulfilled. Peace talks in early August slightly eased tension, but reinforced it in mid-August, stimulating more posts when the peace talks reached a deadlock. The posts insisted that their followers should not compromise. The ceasefire broke down during the evening of August 19. IDF attacked what was believed to be the dwelling place of Mohammad Deif, chief commander of Al-Qassam Brigades.<sup>13</sup> On August 21, Israel killed three Hamas senior commanders (Raed al Atar, Muhammad Abu Shamala and Mohammed Barhoum), which triggered strong indignation from Hamas. The movement fought back with more rockets, eager to show that its military capabilities were not undermined.

Claiming to be persecuted is one of the Resistance Movement's usual tactics, which took up 11.81% of the posts. In June, there were prevailing reports about Israeli forces arresting Palestinians in the West Bank, though there was not a single mention of the three Jewish teenagers who had been kidnapped. The month of July saw portraits of the “unbearable high pressure from Israel” justifying the struggle. In August, the focus turned to Israeli attacks against civilians and children, and forbidding Arabs from entering mosques. On August 23, IDF bombed a residential building believed to be used as Hamas headquarters and caused the building to collapse.<sup>14</sup> This incident also provoked international condemnation. Hamas strongly accused Israel of destroying civilian buildings and prosecuted Israel for war crimes.

Military casualties (3.94%) took the form of paying tribute to martyrs, mainly concerned with the three senior officers killed on August 21.

Military display took 9.45%. Weaponry demonstration was the main topic during early stages of the conflict, in order to portray a tough and heroic image of the militants. From August onwards, in light of the stalled peace talks, the posts actively claimed responsibility for bombing in Tel Aviv and other places, and warned of future attacks, putting psychological pressure on the opponent.

Among the 21 posts coded as criticism, a great majority (19) of them targeted Israel. These

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<sup>13</sup> This airstrike led to the death of his wife and children, but Hamas denied on the night that Deif was killed. Israel confirmed his survival in April 2015.

<sup>14</sup> “Israel destroys 13-story building in Gaza airstrike” August 24

<http://www.cnbc.com/2014/08/24/israel-destroys-13-storey-building-in-gaza-air-strike.html>

mainly emerged in August, accusing Israel of its lack of sincerity and responsibility in peace negotiations, and stating that Israel should take the credit for failing to reach an agreement. Israeli intelligence forces were also mocked for their failure in operations against Mohammad Deif. Another two posts denounced the US for being biased towards Israel and accomplice to the slaughter of Palestinian civilians.

Diplomatic activities reflected the trend of the conflict. Official statements sprung up around July 15, when Hamas and PIJ rejected the ceasefire then IDF launched its ground operation. Mid-August also saw a zenith, when Hamas reiterated its objectives and conditions in the light of the political impasse.

### C. Images

A less official account @gazapl, which aimed to depict the daily life of Gazan people, shone the spotlight on something slightly different. This account was not particularly active at first, but its activities witnessed a significant rise since mid-July, publishing images and posts with great density as well as interacting with other users on the platform.

The following chart shows ratio of the different themes:

Positive incentives	60	20.83%	Determination & unity	20	6.94%
			Carry on living	28	9.72%
			Support from abroad	8	2.78%
			Victory	4	1.39%
Persecution & threat	35	12.15%	Threats from the enemy	35	12.15%
War damage	137	47.57%	Civilian casualties	61	21.18%
			Military casualties	46	15.97%
			Property loss	30	10.42%
Military display	41	14.24%	Weaponry display	24	8.33%
			Military attainments	17	5.90%
Criticism & attack	15	5.21%	Israel	5	1.74%
			International society	3	1.04%
			Arab countries	7	2.43%
			Sum	288	100.00%

Table 2 @gazapl

War damage comprised the greatest share. Nearly half (47.57%) of the 288 sets of images showed Hamas losses. Civilian casualties accounted for the highest density and became increasingly dominant over time; 87% of the pictures were published after July 20. A great deal of the images vividly and brutally presented torn parts of the body, or torsos merely attached to half a head, leaving a strong and uncomfortable visual impact on the audience. Posts about military casualties ran throughout the conflict. The dead were glorified as martyrs, while the wounded were hardly mentioned. The factual pictures of the destruction of civilian properties provided reference for assessing the living conditions of local people. A photo of a crater was often presented alongside another picture taken in the past at the



same place, in order to form a sharp contrast denouncing Israel's crimes.

Positive incentives constituted the second largest proportion (20.83%). In addition to what was portrayed on the other account, images in this section featured a unique topic – how the Gazan people “carry on living” after numerous IDF bombardments, later becoming a crucial theme that could not be ignored. 75% of the relevant images were posted in August when negotiations reached a deadlock, reflecting Hamas's attempt to break through from another perspective.

Military display appeared most frequently in three specific periods. In June, and in mid-July when IDF started ground operations, the pictures showed Hamas's militants in combat position, gripping their weapons and ready to fight. And in the second half of August, especially after the killing of three senior commanders, a vast number of retaliatory attainments emerged.

Threats from the enemy overwhelmingly arose before the second stage of the conflict. Especially during the early days, a large amount of the pictures featured persecution from Israel (constituted 62% of all sets of images published before July 2). Palestinian residents arrested by Israeli forces, Arab properties undermined by settlers, a boy savagely killed,<sup>15</sup> his family threatened by the police, and the Gaza Strip bombed by IDF fighters. All these images transmitted the same message: the enemy is compressing living space; a whole-scale survival crisis means that people can no longer stand by. In July, this theme advertised “whistling bomb breaking peaceful life”, along with the pain and suffering that war brought to children. The fading of this theme in August was succeeded by a burst in “war damage”, indicating that the metaphysical threats had become real devastation.

In terms of attacking others, 80% of the images took the form of comics. A notable factor distinct from the other account was that half of the posts were criticising Arab countries, in addition to Israel and the United States. Arab compatriots were specifically caricatured for being too busy watching the World Cup and turning a blind eye to what was happening in Gaza.

This account exhibited no interest in diplomatic affairs.

#### **D. Interaction of content with other users**

Tweets from @hamasinfo had an average number of retweets and likes at around 100.<sup>16</sup> As this was not the only channel for Hamas to launch official statements and update progress, news of the same subject could be found elsewhere. Given that foreign readers might be informed via their own media, the relatively low level of direct interaction was reasonable.

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<sup>15</sup> The murder of Mohammed Abu Khdeir on July 2

<sup>16</sup> Numbers of likes and retweets are as checked June 2017, which may not truly represent the figures at the time of the conflict

As for @gazapl, tweets with pictures enjoyed a retweet number of roughly two figures, comparing to its followers of presumably around 100,000 by the time of the conflict. However, in addition to the retweets, the contents of this account were often reproduced by other users even from other platforms such as Pinterest and Instagram. The following section is going to analyse some of these interactions by tracing the three most retweeted pictures on this account.

The three pictures that received the most retweets were all published in late July, consistent with the peak in civilian casualties. In a picture posted at 6:04AM July 20,<sup>17</sup> an old man was bending over a table (with what seemed like a metal surface), touching his face to a foot with shoe on as if in grief. Both the old man's face and other parts of the lying body could not be seen. The picture received 200 retweets. The text translated: "When a father says farewell to his son on the foot, because he couldn't find another proper place on his body. You know you are in #Gaza #Al-Shuja'iya massacre #Gaza under bombardment" The words were exactly the same as an earlier tweet at 3:31AM the same day by @hreat (with 147 retweets). The earliest record of this picture the author could find was by Khaled ElAhmad (@Shusmo) at 3:26AM, where the body was identified as "martyr" journalist Khaled Hamad. In a Tweet by @LinahAlsaafin at 6:29AM in English, the text carried on this confirmation: Khaled Hamad, "the journalist who was killed while covering Shuja'iyeh's massacre."

It was within the process of reproduction that the information started to alter. The same picture was posted by @ArabicBest at 7:01PM July 21 and received 1,113 retweets (potentially the highest for this picture on Twitter), with the text translated: "Impressive: the father of a martyr in #Gaza kisses the foot of his son in farewell! 'Think not those who were killed dead in the path of Allah, they are alive with their Lord.'" By simply referring to the body as "martyr" while omitting the "journalist" identity, and adding the "path of Allah," the picture shifted to a different narrative. The tone sounded as if the person had not sacrificed himself for journalism, but for military combat in the spirit of jihad.

The second picture, posted by @gazapl at 6:24AM July 20, showed the hand of an adult picking up a tiny, half-charred foot detached from the body that was hardly the size of an adult palm. There was debris in the background. "This is what remains of a child in #Al-Shuja'iya massacre," it said. The picture went viral from July 20 onwards, being reproduced by various accounts seemingly not only from the Arab world but a much larger audience, and receiving thousands of retweets from some of the posts. Many social media users associate this picture with the "brutality" of Israel, some retweeted with hashtags such as "#Fascist" and "#freePalestine." The picture itself could actually be identified by Google as "Israel killing innocent civilians."

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<sup>17</sup> Time of tweets in this section all refer to Pacific Daylight Time, as shown to the author at the time of this analysis. This is just to provide an idea of "who posted first", not a reference to the actual posting time from the perspective of the account holders

The third picture, posted at 5:58PM July 21, depicted a girl holding the remnants of another body. The text translated: “Painful sights...and still continuing..That's what remains of her sister. Farewell to blood and sacrifice. #Gaza under bombardment.” More accounts started to pick up this picture from July 22. It attracted significant attention from Spanish-speaking audience during the following week. It was also used by some overseas media in their report.

### **Conclusion**

The two accounts represent different but coherent sides of political marketing. The texts from the official account concentrate on diplomatic interaction on the macro level, whereas images reflect daily life in Gaza from a civilian perspective. In fact, the second account so prominently advertises “civilian loss” that it almost looks as if “selling miseries” to the audience.

Two major themes on Hamas’ agenda are inspiration and loss reporting. The former promotes internal unity and a firm belief in the struggle. The latter intends to accuse the enemy of atrocities and to strive winning sympathy and external support. In addition, the manifest theme of enemy threats reflects the persecution that Hamas faces, constructing a sense of crisis while seeking legitimacy for military action. Displays of military might and attainment aim to boost confidence and maintain a sense of superiority. Attacks on opponents or other countries serve as the window of explicit accusation, increasing public pressure placed on other parties.

Over time, the focus did vary. At the preparation stage, there was heavy coverage of “threats from the enemy” to create a stressful atmosphere, in addition to weaponry display which “showed muscle” and enhanced confidence. During the stalemate, calls for determination and tenacity prevailed. There were obvious signs of Hamas trying to divert the attention from its predicament by vehemently accusing other parties. Sacrifice and loss on the part of Hamas ran through the conflict. The emphasis on civilian casualties and how people stubbornly carry on living in the ruins saw a considerable rise in later phases, and took over as the dominating theme. Some pictures explicitly demonstrated brutal scenes, gaining sympathy and putting intense pressure onto the opponent.

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