

From Jihad to Justice: Hamas's Outreach to the International Arena

Batsheva Neuer and Ofir Dayan | No. 2092 | February 2, 2026

This article examines the document that Hamas published in December 2025 summarizing the war and, in particular, the intensifying battle of narratives between Hamas and Israel. Hamas addresses three target audiences: the Palestinian and Arab public, Israel, and the international community. The article focuses especially on Hamas's appeal to Western audiences, primarily in English, and its use of Western concepts, such as referring to Hamas terrorists as "freedom fighters." Hamas also employs gaslighting tactics and makes sophisticated use of journalists and social media influencers to shift blame from the organization to Israel and to fuel human rights-based discourse against it. The objective of these efforts is to frame the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as a moral issue that requires taking a stand in support of the Palestinians. According to public opinion surveys, protests, and solidarity events held during the war, this objective has been achieved to some extent.

Since its founding in 1987, Hamas has crafted its messaging for three principal audiences: the Palestinian and broader Arab public, Israel and its citizens, and the international arena. For Palestinians, Hamas aims to [project](#) resilience and ideological steadfastness to build internal legitimacy and mobilize support for violence against Israel. For Arab audiences, it seeks political and ideological backing. Toward Israelis, it aims for deterrence while sowing fear, confusion, and demoralization. This article focuses on the third target audience—the international one, and examines the narratives Hamas promotes to contest those advanced by Israel and its supporters. Hamas's December 2025 document "[Al-Aqsa Flood: Two Years of Steadfastness and the Will for Liberation](#)," which summarizes the war with Israel, offers a useful window into its messaging—both the narratives it constructs and the Israeli claims it tries to counter or rebut. As in its other recent publications, Hamas seeks to engage Western public opinion by adopting Western terminology to describe Islamist phenomena, such as the term "freedom fighters," which appears in parentheses following descriptions of the "knights" and "mujahideen" referring to Hamas operatives. Notably, this designation appears only in the English version and is absent from the Arabic version.

Overall, the Hamas document—replete with falsehoods, inversions, misattribution of atrocities, distortions, and half-truths—functions not only as a defense of the organization and its actions but also as a declaration regarding the very nature of the struggle. This narrative uproots the conflict from its regional context and recasts it as a struggle on behalf of all humanity. Within this framework, Israel is presented as the embodiment of everything the "free world" is supposed to reject. Once regarded as a beacon of democracy—the "villa in the jungle"—Israel is reimagined as having become the jungle itself, masquerading as a villa. By portraying Israel as the focal point of the world's moral failure, the document also echoes

longstanding antisemitic tropes in which Jews are depicted as the embodiment of all that is perceived as corrupt, dangerous, or inhuman.

From Islamic Rhetoric to Western Rhetoric

In its early years, Hamas relied primarily on Islamic religious rhetoric and made little attempt to speak in Western political or legal idioms. This is evident in its 1988 founding charter, which differs sharply from the movement's later texts. The charter is, above all, a religious document: It vehemently rejects secularism, is saturated with Quranic citations, and frames the movement's aims in explicitly theological terms. In later documents, by contrast, Hamas increasingly adopts secular Western language, invoking human rights, international law, and universal moral concepts, with religious references largely confined to brief introductory sections. The charter also openly identifies Hamas as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, a linkage Hamas later avoids, including in its December 2025 document. Finally, the charter advances a highly conservative view of gender roles—positions that would sit uneasily with the Western audiences Hamas's later publications appear designed to reach. A central shift between Hamas's founding charter and its 2025 war document is who is called upon to act on behalf of the Palestinians. While the charter presents the Palestinian cause as an Islamic obligation, binding Muslims everywhere, Hamas now frames the issue as an international one, demanding the immediate intervention of citizens everywhere who view themselves as "enlightened" and "moral." In practice, Hamas seeks (and has succeeded to some extent) to transform the Palestinian cause into a litmus test for the moral standing of Western societies and individuals. In doing so, Hamas moralizes the conflict, in contrast to its long-standing political framing of the struggle. Moreover, Hamas now aims to assume the role of the representative of the Palestinian cause internationally, once belonging to the PLO and later the Palestinian Authority.

This approach is not new. Hamas's rhetorical shift and its veneer of "Westernization" was already apparent in 2017 with the publication of its "[Document of General Principles and Policies](#)," which adopted a relatively humanistic and tolerant stance toward secularism. This shift likely reflects Hamas's evolving position in the international arena in recent years. Once treated as a pariah, Hamas has increasingly been regarded as an actor with which engagement is deemed possible, as is reflected in its ties with Turkey (a NATO member), Qatar (a US ally), and its growing acceptance among various Western audiences, particularly on [university campuses](#) and within civil society organizations. That partial normalization sharpened Hamas's incentive to cultivate legitimacy among Western publics and to convert public sentiment into strategic leverage. In January 2024, several months after the attack on October 7, 2023, Hamas issued "[Our Narrative...Operation Al-Aqsa Flood](#)," which functioned as a defensive brief in response to the widespread criticism following the massacre. This document also employs more Western-oriented rhetoric. The document is shorter and less comprehensive than the December 2025 war summary, but it previews many of the same rhetorical moves, especially the attempt to speak in a moral idiom that is more familiar to Western audiences. By December 2025, however, the tone has hardened. The later document reads as though Hamas is satisfied with the degree of international support it received during the war and with what it perceives as the failure of Israeli public diplomacy. Rather than merely mitigating reputational damage, Hamas mounts a direct moral indictment of Israel's wartime conduct. The text also refers to the October 7 massacre as "The Day of [the] Glorious

Crossing,” a phrase that communicates pride even in an English-facing context. The word “crossing” is not neutral here; it echoes Egyptian terminology used to glorify the opening move of the Yom Kippur War, widely regarded as changing the course of the war.

Israel, by contrast, has not produced an adequate public-facing response to these Hamas claims or to the extensive documentation and imagery emerging from the Gaza Strip, nor has it initiated sufficient efforts to formulate and disseminate its own messages. One explanation is strategic restraint: Responding risks amplifying Hamas’s narratives. Yet, the cumulative effect of restraint has been to leave Western public opinion more exposed to Hamas’s framing. Moreover, Israel has often refrained from foregrounding its efforts to operate under international law, inadvertently reinforcing Hamas’s claim that Israel violated that law.

Hamas’s Morality Versus Israel’s Immorality

A core maneuver in the December 2025 document is the claim that Hamas avoids civilian harm on principle: “killing civilians is not part of our religion, morality, or education; and we avoid it whenever we can.” This constitutes an attempt at gaslighting; that is, encouraging audiences to doubt the reality of what they personally experienced, in the case of residents of Israel’s western Negev and visitors to the area, or what they saw with their own eyes, learned from relatives and acquaintances, or consumed through the media. It may also serve a defensive purpose among Muslim audiences that were shocked by the brutality of October 7, deeming it “un-Islamic.” The claim stands in complete contradiction to the orders issued by Hamas commanders to their operatives, confirmed by the operational orders found on the bodies of terrorists during the clearing of the Gaza envelope and in documents seized by IDF forces during operations in the Strip.

For example, on the body of a terrorist found at Kibbutz Mefalsim, Israeli forces reportedly recovered [operational orders](#) directing him and his accomplices to abduct civilians as well as soldiers. The instructions emphasized maximizing fear: Civilians were to be driven from their homes, and as many people as possible were to be killed in order to instill terror among the widest possible number of Israelis. Those directives were further reinforced by [a document attributed to Yahya Sinwar](#), then Hamas’s leader, urging operatives to kill and stressing that atrocities should be filmed and widely disseminated to serve multiple strategic goals across different audiences. Sinwar’s logic was explicitly psychological: The footage, he believed, would help incite Arab audiences to violence against Jews while simultaneously prompting Jews to flee and emigrate. Although Hamas insists such actions violate Islamic values, the document opens with a conventional religious invocation: “In the name of Allah, the Compassionate and Merciful...”, a framing that undercuts the claim that the organization’s leadership did not associate these acts with religious obligations and suggests the opposite: that a revered leader cast them in devotional terms. To blunt the stigma of civilian slaughter, the December 2025 document pivots to inversion. It asserts that “killing civilians, committing brutal massacres, and ethnic cleansing are original Zionist behaviors since this entity’s [Israel] establishment,” insisting, without qualification, that “thousands” of proofs leave “no room for doubt or debate.” The move is familiar—relocate the charges leveled at Hamas onto Israel, shifting moral burden from perpetrator to victim. That reframing has gained traction in parts of the West as well, where outrage is increasingly organized around a selective amnesia about Hamas’s crimes alongside a selective fixation on Israel’s conduct during the war.

Denying Israel's Legitimacy and Rebranding It as a "Western" State

Equally significant is Hamas's assertion that Israel's killing of civilians and brutal massacres are not aberrations but a continuous pattern dating back to the state's founding. In this framing, Israel is not merely a state engaged in warfare, or even one accused of grave abuses; it is recast as an entity whose existence is rooted in and inseparable from criminal violence. The implication is maximal: If Israel's origins and identity are defined by such acts, then it is not simply blameworthy but fundamentally illegitimate, an entity that has no right to exist.

Alongside its effort to deny Israel's right to exist, and evidently aware that outright eliminationist claims will not command universal assent in the West, Hamas uses the document to pursue a parallel objective: stripping Israel of its Western identity and legitimacy. The October 7 attack, the text suggests, accelerated the erosion of Israel's status as "the only democracy in the Middle East." In several passages, the text goes beyond questioning Israel's democratic character and depicts it as betraying the liberal Western values it claims to embody. October 7, the document argues, "transformed the Israeli entity from a 'fortress of Western civilization' into a moral and political burden for its allies. 'Israel' is no longer seen as the so-called 'only democracy in the Middle East'..." Images of children killed in Gaza are offered as "the new face of Israel," while the scale of destruction is treated as conclusive evidence of moral collapse; Israel's deepening isolation is then framed not as a warning sign but as a victory—proof that it is becoming, and deserves to become, a pariah. In effect, Hamas takes the moral authority of human rights language and repurposes it as a weapon. The December 2025 document underscores that terms such as "genocide" and "settler colonialism" now circulate widely in the global discourse on the Palestinian issue; yet the goal is not merely rhetorical victory. The text elevates "Palestine" as a new moral yardstick, as a benchmark for justice, freedom, and human rights, recasting the conflict as the defining moral test of our age. In this framing, individuals from the West who wish to view themselves as enlightened and just must support this cause and speak on its behalf. The argument culminates in the claim that world opinion has decisively shifted against Israel and toward the Palestinians. To bolster that claim, the document cites polling data, including a [Harris Poll](#) conducted with Harvard University, which shows that 60% of those aged 18–24 (Generation Z) support Hamas rather than Israel. "Victory," in this telling, is not only Palestinian but a victory for humanity itself.

The Centrality of the Narrative War in Hamas's Strategy

One revealing indicator of how central Hamas considers the narrative battlefield is its classification of journalists as "civilian heroes," alongside medical personnel, police, and civil defense. At first glance, the category is incongruous until one accepts Hamas's premise that the war is cognitive as much as kinetic. If the decisive arena is perception, legitimacy, and outrage, then journalists become functional equivalents of first responders: essential to sustaining the story. Hamas reinforces this point by accusing Israel of killing journalists and preventing media access to the Gaza Strip. Israel, for its part, has argued that many of the journalists killed were active members of terrorist organizations and that it has facilitated the entry of international media into Gaza, albeit under IDF escort. Hamas nevertheless presses the allegation, aware that Israel's defense has not been broadly accepted internationally, a point underscored by advocacy and legal efforts such as the by [a petition](#) filed by Reporters

Without Borders with Israel's High Court, alleging that Israel does not allow journalists to report freely from Gaza. The issue therefore becomes a standing instrument for reputational harm, and Hamas continues to foreground it across its publications. More broadly, throughout the war, Hamas has demonstrated a sophisticated grasp of modern media dynamics. According to organizational documents, the Qatari network Al Jazeera [served](#) as a propaganda arm of Hamas and had full cooperation from the organization, benefiting both parties. Social media influencers, the digital "counterparts" of journalists, were likewise granted access to senior Hamas figures and to areas of destruction and combat.

Conclusion

Hamas's postwar narrative strategy, as reflected in its December 2025 document, is not incidental propaganda but a coordinated persuasion campaign aimed primarily at international audiences. By employing language and idioms widely recognized as morally and normatively significant within liberal democracies—human rights, international law, anti-racism, liberation, and victimhood—Hamas seeks to shift the conflict from a religious, political-territorial, or security dispute into a universal moral framework in which neutrality is unacceptable, let alone support for Israel. The toolkit presented in the document, including the rebranding of perpetrators of terrorism as "freedom fighters," the shifting of responsibility and blame, and the appropriation of the language of international law, is designed to erode Israel's basic legitimacy and to mobilize external pressure as a strategic asset. Even if public opinion polls should be treated with caution, the central claim remains valid: Hamas is investing in "soft power," positioning the West as a central arena of struggle. Understanding this front is therefore essential for assessing how narratives are translated into cultural and political gains.

Israel, accordingly, would benefit from responding to Hamas's claims in a systematic and sustained way, refuting them through the use of visual materials and by adapting its language to that of its Western target audiences. Over the two years of war, Israel often appeared to freeze in place, dismissing Hamas's messaging as mere propaganda or psychological warfare, thereby avoiding direct engagement. Yet propaganda is most effective when it is left uncontested. Many in the West have absorbed Hamas's framing; Israel therefore has to meet it with the seriousness the moment demands through credible civilian spokespeople, consistent messaging, and sustained attention to the audiences Hamas is most intent on influencing.

Editors of the series: Anat Kurz, Eldad Shavit and Ela Greenberg