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Benedetta Berti & Beatriz Gutiérrez


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## Rebel-to-political and back? Hamas as a security provider in Gaza between rebellion, politics and governance

Benedetta Berti<sup>a</sup>  and Beatriz Gutiérrez<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel; <sup>b</sup>Department of Law, European University of Madrid, Villaviciosa de Odón, Spain

### ABSTRACT

After winning the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections and subsequently taking control of the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2007, the Palestinian Hamas – a hybrid political, social and military actor – undertook a complex process to ascertain authority and control over Gaza. The article focuses on understanding Hamas's performance as a political party and a "rebel government" as well as the impact of this newly acquired role on the group's strategy. Relying on primary sources, field-work and interviews with members of the Hamas government and its security sector, the study looks at Hamas's role as a security provider and analyses the complex relationship between the institutionalized security sector and the group's insurgent armed wing. Examining Hamas's logic as a security provider and exploring the inherent tensions between political and insurgent logics allows for a better understanding of both the rebel group's role as a political actor and the broader challenges behind the successful rebel-to-political transformations of non-state armed organizations. In doing so it contributes to the emerging literature on non-state actors' shifts between ballots and bullets and on their potential role as alternative governance providers.


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### Squaring the circle? Rebel groups as political parties and governance-security providers

An especially interesting, yet under-researched question in the emerging literature examining rebel-to-political transformations of non-state armed groups (NSAGs)<sup>1</sup> pertains to these actors' ability to operate as political and governance actors *whilst* retaining a military apparatus.<sup>2</sup> How does preserving an armed wing affect armed groups' operations as political parties and their broader relationship with institutional politics and the existing political order? Even though disarmament and demobilization are often seen as preconditions to rebel party-building,<sup>3</sup> rebel groups can develop political and governance functions while maintaining formal or informal involvement in insurgency and rebellion. Better understanding this dynamic and the inherent tensions it produces can help shed light on the broader challenges of transitioning from bullets to ballots and

**CONTACT** Benedetta Berti  [benedettabe@gmail.com](mailto:benedettabe@gmail.com)

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