



Hamas Promotes a "Victory" Narrative for Gaza Strip War

February 16, 2025

Overview¹

► The announcement of the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, even before it went into effect on January 19, 2025, provided Hamas with an opportunity to start promoting a "victory" narrative over Israel in the Gaza Strip War, which they refer to as Operation al-Aqsa Flood, which began with the Hamas terrorist attack and massacre on October 7, 2023.

► Official statements from Hamas and its senior figures, amplified by the movement's official and affiliated media outlets, as well as during public "release ceremonies" for Israeli hostages, aimed to promote the narrative that Israel had failed to achieve its objectives against the "resistance"² and the "steadfastness" of the Gazans.

The implementation of the agreement, such as the release of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Israeli hostages, the return of displaced persons to northern Gaza and the Israeli withdrawal from the Netzarim Corridor were also used to contrast Hamas' "victory" with Israel's "failure."

► Hamas' media made extensive use of statements from Israeli political, military and media figures, which in their perspective reinforced the message of Israel's "failure" to achieve the war's objectives.

► **In ITIC assessment, Hamas will continue highlighting Israel's failure to achieve its objectives and promoting the "victory" narrative as long as the ceasefire agreement is maintained, in order to soften public criticism in Gaza of the extensive devastation in the Strip.** If the agreement transitions to the second phase, which is expected to include further Israeli withdrawals from Gaza and the release of more prisoners who committed particularly serious crimes, Hamas will intensify its "victory" propaganda to increase its power in Gaza and maintain its position in the Palestinian arena, even if it is forced to relinquish actual control over the Gaza Strip.

¹ Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications

² Palestinian terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip.

The Hamas "Victory"

► The announcement on January 15, 2025, of a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip by Qatar's Prime Minister, marked the launch of Hamas' "victory" campaign, which intensified when the ceasefire went into effect on January 19, 2025. Hamas quickly promoted the "victory" narrative, claiming that the "resistance" and the "steadfastness" of Gaza residents had forced Israel to halt its "aggression" and had prevented it from achieving its objectives. The narrative continued to be promoted during the implementation of the agreement with the release of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Israeli hostages and the withdrawal of IDF forces from parts of the Gaza Strip. Khalil al-Hayya, the acting head of the Hamas political bureau in Gaza, who led the Hamas negotiating team, gave the main themes of the narrative in a speech announcing the finalization of the agreement. He said,

"Today we prove to the occupation that it has not succeeded and will not succeed in defeating our people and their resistance, achieving nothing but despair, destruction and massacres of our people, and failing to bring back its [hostage] prisoners except through an agreement with the resistance to stop the war and aggression and through an honorable [sic] exchange agreement. Therefore, we say with confidence and certainty, the steadfastness of our people, their immense sacrifices and the courage of their resistance have defeated the declared and hidden objectives of the occupation in this war, and the will of our people remains free, proud and pure, untainted by any stain of cowardice or weakness, but remains honorable and exalted until the very last moment" (Hamas in Judea and Samaria Telegram channel, January 15, 2025).

Israel failed to achieve its objectives

► Hamas has consistently emphasized, both through statements by senior figures and visual content, in its Telegram channel, al-Risalah, al-Aqsa TV, and Quds and Shehab news agencies, a series of "failures" attributed to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and his government to achieve the declared and (in their view) the "hidden" objectives of the war, including the failure to eliminate Hamas, failure to uproot the Gazans, failure to free the hostages through military pressure, severe divisions within the government, heavy damage to the Israeli economy, the threat of lawsuits in the International Court of Justice, arrest warrants issued against Prime Minister Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant by the International Criminal Court, significant losses within the IDF ranks and damage to Israel's international standing.



Right: An infographic listing a series of failures. "Netanyahu loses his war in Gaza" (al-Risalah Telegram channel, January 19, 2025). Left: "The occupation's objectives thwarted by the resistance" (Shihab, January 18, 2025)

► Since the first phase of the ceasefire agreement began on January 19, 2025, Hamas spokesmen have often highlighted every step taken by Israel as part of its commitments under the agreement as a "victory" for them and a "failure" for Netanyahu, who they claim was forced to back down. Even delays by Israel in implementing phases of the agreement are labeled by Hamas as an attempt by the prime minister to cover up his "failures." For example, Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanua said, "The return of the displaced, the continued prisoner exchanges and the withdrawal from the [Netzarim] corridor refute Netanyahu's lie and his illusion of a complete victory over our people" (al-Risalah, February 9, 2025).

► To emphasize the Hamas narrative of Israel's "failure," the Hamas publishes quotes from Israeli media, political and military officials, journalists and commentators on social media and in affiliated media outlets, using their statements when consistent with Hamas propaganda. In general, during military conflicts, Hamas significantly increases its quoting of Israeli media both for psychological warfare and to reinforce its "victory" narrative.

- ◆ Yossi Yehoshua, military analyst for Yedioth Ahronoth, said, "After 15 months of war, Netanyahu's failure is a political failure, and the failure of the chief of staff and the military is a military failure. No victory was achieved over Hamas, both the political and military leadership have failed" (al-Quds Agency Telegram channel, January 14, 2025).
- ◆ Prof. Uzi Rabi, Middle East scholar said, "Hamas is still standing and has a coherent strategy" (al-Risalah, January 16).
- ◆ Maj. Gen. (res.) Giora Eiland said, "Hamas won and Israel lost and failed resoundingly" (al-Risalah, January 18, 2025).
- ◆ A series of statements by Israeli journalists and commentators indicated that besides the unachieved war objectives, the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip created

Consistent use of the word "flood"

► The Hamas "victory" narrative often makes use of the word "flood" (tufan) to emphasize that the "achievements" which allegedly resulted from the October 7, 2023 attack and massacre are, in its view, an integral part of Operation al-Aqsa Flood and would not have been achieved without the attack. By doing so, Hamas aims to respond to critics of the October 7, 2023 attack from both inside Gaza and beyond:

- ◆ Hamas named the deal for the release of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Israeli hostages the Flood of the Free deal (tufan al-ahrar).
- ◆ Zaher Jabarin, head of the shaheeds, prisoners and wounded office in Hamas, said, "The release of prisoners as part of the Flood of the Free deal is a historic victory for the will of the Palestinian people and its brave resistance" (Quds Press, January 29, 2025).
- ◆ The large public participation in welcoming ceremonies for released prisoners is referred to in Hamas media as a "human flood" (Quds Agency Telegram channel, January 30, 2025).
- ◆ On February 8, 2025, the fifth time Israeli hostages were released, a giant banner on the stage in Deir al-Balah read, "We are the tufa [sic]... we are the day after." A few days later, following criticism from international surfers over spelling errors, Hamas republished the message with the correct translation: "We are the flood... we are the day after."



Right: The banner with spelling errors at the hostage release site (Quds Agency Telegram channel, February 8, 2025). Left: The corrected Hamas banner (Hamas Judea and Samaria Telegram channel, February 10, 2025)

Steadfastness and sacrifice"

► The concept of "steadfastness" (sumud) is always prevalent in Hamas' media during routine times but is emphasized and amplified during times of war. As part of establishing Hamas' "victory" narrative, "firm stance" is presented as a noble trait the Gazans, which enabled them

to survive the [so-called] "genocidal war" for 15 months and allowed the Hamas leadership to adhere to its "principles" and impose its conditions on Israel. "Sacrifice" is represented as complementing "steadfastness," mobilized by Hamas to raise the Gazans' morale and to mitigate the criticism it faces in the Strip because of the war's heavy toll on lives and property.

► The Hamas media often publish pictures of Gazans standing on the ruins of their homes to show their "steadfastness," despite the extensive destruction, and the "failure of the occupation" to displace them from their land.

The value of "sacrifice" is also highlighted in the context of the "martyrdom" of the movement's leaders and senior figures, who serve as role models and whose "sacrifices" are personal examples.

► The elements of "steadfastness" and "sacrifice" also appear in Hamas statements and in declarations of its senior figures and spokesmen:

◆ A statement published by Hamas on the eve of the Qatari announcement of the ceasefire agreement read: "The agreement is the fruit of the legendary steadfastness of our Palestinian people" (al-Risalah, January 15, 2025).

◆ After the ceasefire agreement was approved, Khalil al-Haya, head of the Hamas political bureau in Gaza, said, "We say with confidence, the steadfastness of our people, their great sacrifice and the courage of their resistance have thwarted the declared and hidden objectives of the occupation in this war" (Shehab Agency, January 15, 2025).

◆ Muhammad Darwish, chairman of the Hamas Shura Council, said during a reception ceremony in Cairo for released prisoners that the "steadfastness" of the Gazans made them a global symbol of resilience and "resistance" (Quds Agency Telegram channel, January 29, 2025).

◆ Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said in a statement marking the implementation of the third phase of the hostage release deal that the Palestinian people, with their legendary "steadfastness," courage and unity in support of the resistance, were behind Hamas' success in the war (al-Risalah, January 30, 2025).



Right: A Gazan family on the ruins of their home in Deir al-Balah (Quds Agency Telegram channel, January 10, 2025). Left: Hamas senior figures who became shaheeds (al-Risalah Telegram channel, January 31, 2025)

Integrating the Victory Narrative into Implementing the Ceasefire Agreement

The hostage deal as a Hamas victory

- ▶ Hamas views the hostage deal itself as an achievement and a victory, leveraging and fully exploiting each phase of the hostage releases to promote its "victory" narrative. Hamas repeatedly emphasizes that Israel failed to free the vast majority of the hostages through military pressure and only succeeded through an agreement, representing it as a victory manifested by Israel's "surrendering" to Hamas' terms. Hamas propaganda relies heavily on statements from Israeli officials, former military personnel and commentators which appeared in Israeli media, and convey the notion that military pressure did not achieve its goal and did not lead to the release of the hostages.
- ▶ That Hamas continues to dominate the Gaza Strip, remaining the ruling authority in the Gaza Strip and the sole party with whom Israel is forced to negotiate for the hostages' release, supports its "victory" narrative. Hamas staged and publicized most phases of the Israeli hostages' releases and transfers to the Red Cross in highly choreographed ceremonies, which included armed guards, a decorated stage to which the hostages were led, filming hostages wearing "hostage tags" and bracelets in the colors of the Palestinian flag while holding "release certificates" bearing the Hamas logo, and conducting "interviews" with the hostages before their release, forcing them to repeat Hamas texts. Emphasis was also placed on the hostages' attire, representing them as prisoners of war.



Right: The stage with the Hebrew inscription "Zionism will not win" (Quds Agency Telegram channel, January 25, 2025). Left: Female hostages wearing tags at the release ceremony (Hamas combat information, January 25, 2025)



Right: Agam Berger holding a certificate and a bracelet with the colors of the Palestinian flag (Quds Agency Telegram channel, January 30, 2025). Left: Ohad Ben Ami wearing an "al-Qassam Brigades prisoner" shirt (Quds Agency Telegram channel, February 8, 2025)

The release of the Palestinian terrorist prisoners

► The release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli prisons in exchange for the release of hostages, as stipulated in the agreement, is represented as a symbol of Hamas' "victory" in having imposed its terms on Israel and adhered to its "principle" that the release of Israeli hostages could only be achieved through the release of Palestinian prisoners, including hardcore prisoners sentenced to long terms, including life imprisonment. Hamas also represented the prisoner release as fulfilling a fundamental commitment to its supporters, made possible solely by its victory. That was reflected by Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem, who said, "We forced the occupation to cross the red lines it had set for itself and release prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment" (alresala.net, January 30, 2025).

► Hamas' media outlets give extensive coverage to prisoner releases focusing on the celebrations and receptions held for the released prisoners in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, and even in Cairo, where some prisoners were deported and were given a festive reception led by senior Palestinian faction leaders.

► The receptions and celebrations for well-known high-profile prisoners who were freed under the agreement, such as Zakaria Zubeidi, received special media attention, as their release significantly bolstered the "victory" narrative.



**Right: Released prisoners deported to Cairo (al-Risalah Telegram channel, January 26, 2025).
Left: Reception in Cairo for prisoners attended by faction leaders (alresala.net Telegram channel, January 26, 2025)**



Zakaria Zubeidi, the released prisoner, celebrating his release (Palinfo website, January 30, 2025)

The return of the displaced Gazans to the northern Strip

► On January 27, 2025, at 7:00 a.m., IDF forces withdrew from parts of the Netzarim Corridor, allowing Palestinian residents to move from the southern Gaza Strip to the north, via both pedestrian and vehicular routes, for the first time since late October 2023. Hamas authorities in Gaza reported that half a million people returned to northern Gaza within just 72 hours.³

► The return of displaced to northern Gaza has become a prominent feature of Hamas' "victory" narrative. While the extensive destruction of the Gaza Strip and the fact that many displaced residents remain homeless are widely covered in Hamas media (as part of the "victim" narrative), the Hamas message is that the land of Gaza remains in the hands of its owners and that Israel failed to force the Gazans' displacement.

³ A significant number saw the devastation and returned to the southern Gaza Strip. For further information, see the February 2025 ITIC report, "[The atmosphere among Palestinians who returned to the northern Gaza Strip.](#)"

► Hamas media played a significant role in reinforcing this element of the "victory" narrative by photographing masses of Gazans carrying their belongings and returning on foot to their homes and kissing the ground, and by interviewing Gazans going north, alongside cartoons and pictures. Announcements by the movement and its senior figures related to the issue of the returning displaced, often quoting the Israeli media.

- ◆ Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem said, "The return to northern Gaza after the ceasefire agreement reflects the failure of one of the war's objectives to bring about the displacement of our people from their Palestinian land. Our people's deepened hold on their land despite the unprecedented genocidal war [sic] has settled the struggle for Palestinian existence on the land in favor of our people" (alresala.net, January 23, 2025).
- ◆ According to an official statement, "The return of the displaced is a victory for our people and a declaration of the occupation's failure and its migration schemes" (alresala.net, January 27, 2025).
- ◆ Senior Hamas official Izzat al-Rishq said, "The sight of displaced persons returning to northern Gaza shattered all the occupation's illusions about the migration of our people" (alresala.net, January 27, 2025).
- ◆ Hamas political bureau member Husam Badran said, "The image of the return to northern Gaza is the pinnacle of the occupation's failure, its defeat and its retreat" (al-Risalah, January 28, 2025).
- ◆ Haaretz military analyst Amos Harel wrote that the sight of masses of Palestinians returning to northern Gaza shattered the illusions of total victory that Netanyahu and his supporters had been promoting for months (al-Risalah, which 28, 2025).



Right: A cartoon by Mahmoud Abbas [no relation to the Palestinian Authority chairman], "Hurry, the war is over" (al-Risalah Telegram channel, January 28, 2025). Left: Photograph of displaced Gazans returning to the north (Shehab Agency, January 27, 2025)

The withdrawal of the IDF from the Netzarim Corridor

► The IDF withdrawal from the Netzarim Corridor after a continuous presence of a year and three months in the corridor that separated northern Gaza from the south is regarded by Hamas as the pinnacle of the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. On February 8, 2025, immediately after the Israeli media reported that the IDF had been ordered to evacuate the last outposts in the corridor, Hamas began leveraging the withdrawal for its "victory" narrative by publishing pictures of Israeli forces preparing to leave. From the early morning hours of February 9, 2025, as the withdrawal was completed, Hamas channels began publishing pictures of the "liberated" corridor with heavy traffic in both directions.

► Hamas statements and remarks by its senior officials following the Israeli withdrawal from the Netzarim Corridor sought to turn it into a resounding victory for Hamas and a painful failure for Israel, particularly in light of the prime minister's months-long declarations that the IDF would not withdraw from the corridor:

◆ According to Hamas, "The withdrawal of the Zionist occupation army from the Netzarim Corridor reflects the victory of our people's will, highlights the firm stance and bravery of our courageous resistance and affirms the failure of the goals of the terrorist aggression" (al-Risalah Telegram channel, February 9, 2025).

◆ Senior Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri said, "The sight of the humiliating Israeli withdrawal from the Netzarim Corridor is a declaration of Netanyahu's defeat and failure to achieve his objectives or remain on Gaza's land. In 2005, the criminal Sharon withdrew from Gaza despite saying 'Netzarim is like Tel Aviv.' Today, twenty years later, the scene repeats itself with Netanyahu withdrawing humiliated from Netzarim despite saying, 'I will never withdraw from Netzarim under any circumstances'" (Shehab Agency, February 9, 2025).

◆ Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanua said, "The full withdrawal of Zionist occupation forces from the Netzarim Corridor is another failure in the genocidal war's objectives in Gaza. The return of the displaced, the continuation of prisoner exchange deals and the withdrawal from the Netzarim Corridor refute Netanyahu's lie and his illusion of a complete victory over our people" (al-Risalah Telegram channel, February 9, 2025).

- ◆ According to the Hamas government information office in Gaza, "The occupation's withdrawal from the Netzarim Corridor is one of the important achievements of our people" (al-Araby TV, February 9, 2025).

The reopening of the Rafah Crossing

- ▶ The reopening of the Rafah Crossing for the passage of patients on January 31, 2025, after being closed by the IDF in Rafah in May 2024, is considered by Hamas as another achievement of the ceasefire agreement. Hamas is leveraging it as part of its "victory" narrative, particularly because Israel is not responsible for managing the crossing, as it had demanded, but rather EU personnel. However, Hamas' main objective in relating to the Rafah Crossing is to enlist domestic support and emphasize its efforts on behalf of the sick and wounded, as the reopening of the Crossing daily enables fifty sick and wounded Gazans, accompanied by three escorts, to go to Egypt for treatment, including injured terrorist operatives.
- ▶ Hamas media closely covers each group of patients leaving through the Rafah Crossing, reporting the number of each group starting from the first that crossed on February 1, 2025, with videos of patients waiting at the gates before their departure to Egypt.



Right: Aid trucks waiting at the Rafah Crossing and EU monitors' vehicles (Quds Agency Telegram channel, January 31, 2025). Left: Patients from Gaza on their way to the Rafah Crossing for medical treatment in Egypt (Quds Agency Telegram channel, February 1, 2025)



Gazan patients in the departure terminal at the Rafah Crossing (Quds Agency Telegram channel, February 1, 2025)