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(NON)COMBATANTS AND INSURGENCY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
MILITARY IDENTITY IN HEZBOLLAH AND HAMAS

MA Thesis

Supervisor: Shpend Kursani, PhD

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the divergent use of military uniforms by two similar non-state actors: Hezbollah and Hamas. While both groups share numerous characteristics, including Islamic ideological foundations, anti-Israeli resistance agendas, Iranian sponsorship, territorial governance, and being non-state actors, they differ significantly in one key behavioral outcome: Hezbollah frequently employs standardized military uniforms, whereas Hamas rarely does. In order to isolate the independent factors causing this behavioral divergence, the study uses Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD), which enables the control of shared variables. This thesis finds that the most compelling explanation lies in the interplay between operational environment, strategic logic, and structural incentives. Hamas's avoidance of uniforms is a deliberate tactical adaptation to Gaza's densely populated urban terrain, which favors stealth, civilian camouflage, and asymmetrical warfare. This decision also serves propaganda purposes, potentially inflating civilian casualty figures and enhancing international sympathy. Conversely, Hezbollah's use of uniforms is facilitated by its more rural and mountainous, less densely populated operational environment and greater access to consistent Iranian support, which all make blending in with the civilian population less advantageous. Even though they are taken into account, theories such as shifting global recognition or resource constraints are ultimately found to be insufficient to explain the pattern that has been observed. Even though there is a resource disparity between these groups, this does not fully account for Hamas's activities, especially given its ability to fund complex infrastructure like Gaza's tunnel system. Instead, the study concludes that uniform use is best understood as a function of operational necessity, strategic objectives, and external constraints rather than material capability alone. This research contributes to the broader literature on armed non-state actors by demonstrating how variations in tactical environments and organizational strategy can lead to divergent military practices, even among otherwise similar groups.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

Counterinsurgency – COIN

Improvised Explosive Device – IED

International Humanitarian Law – IHL

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – IRGC

Israel Defense Forces – IDF

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen – JNIM

Lebanese Armed Forces - LAF

Most Similar Systems Design – MSSD

Palestine Liberation Organization - PLO

Palestinian Islamic Jihad – PIJ

Rocket-Propelled Grenade – RPG

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East - UNRWA

Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device – VBIEDS

Violent Extremist Organization – VEO

## **1. Introduction**

In the past year, specifically since the 7<sup>th</sup> of October, 2023 attacks against Israel, we have seen more and more discussion around militant groups and guerrilla warfare, some of which have been dubbed as terrorist by certain governments and international organizations. Hezbollah and Hamas are two militant groups that operate in similar geopolitical, religious, and ideological contexts. Both are non-state actors rooted in Islamic resistance movements, both oppose Israel, both have received significant external support from Iran, and both are major political and military parties/organizations. They have also engaged in both guerrilla warfare and governance in their respective territories.

Despite these many similarities, their divergent practices in the use of military uniforms present a puzzle. Hezbollah fighters are often seen wearing state-like-actor military uniforms during military engagements with their adversaries, whereas Hamas militants, particularly during the recent conflict, have operated primarily as a guerrilla-like non-state actor without them. This thesis aims to explore the strategic, political, and tactical reasons behind these divergent practices among very similar military actors. Therefore, I ask: why does one insurgent group adhere to certain conventions of warfare by wearing uniforms to identify as combatants, while the other avoids them?

My hypotheses are that Hezbollah's adoption of state-like military uniforms is influenced by its more stable, long-standing formalized military structure, its operational environment in Southern Lebanon, and its pursuit of political legitimacy both domestically and internationally. At the same time, I hypothesize that Hamas' avoidance of uniforms is driven by its reliance on asymmetric urban warfare, where blending with civilians is advantageous. Therefore, the choice of whether insurgent groups adopt a combatant identity, such as by wearing uniforms, is influenced primarily by their geographic setting; the tactical advantages they seek within that environment; and the organizational structure of the militant group. In open or rural terrains, where identifying as a military force can serve to enhance legitimacy or discipline, groups may favor uniforms. Conversely, in urban or densely populated areas, where blending with the civilian population provides tactical benefits, groups may avoid identifiable combatant attire. Thus, the choice to adopt or avoid uniforms reflects strategic considerations based on the group's structure and operational environment.

While Hamas maintains a covert presence in the West Bank, this thesis will primarily focus on the Gaza Strip. Since 2007, Hamas has exercised full territorial and administrative control over Gaza, following its violent split from the Palestinian Authority. This makes Gaza the central arena for understanding Hamas both as a governing authority and as a militant actor. In contrast, the West Bank remains under the partial control of the Palestinian Authority and is subject to heavy Israeli military oversight. There, Hamas does not hold power and operates mostly in secret, using underground cells that are frequently the target of IDF raids. Since those involved are frequently dressed in civilian clothes and these operations usually take place in heavily populated civilian areas, it can be challenging to tell militants apart from the general populace. Further complicating matters and making it harder to distinguish between organized militant activity and social unrest is the fact that the West Bank is also marked by an increase in civilian-to-civilian violence, especially between Israeli settlers and Palestinian residents.

In contrast, Hamas's military is more centralized and visible in Gaza. Large-scale conflicts with Israel, such as coordinated rocket attacks, tunnel incursions, and protracted armed conflicts, are primarily launched from Gaza. Focusing on Gaza, therefore, allows for a more direct and structured analysis of Hamas's behavior and role within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, without the ambiguity that characterizes its presence in the West Bank.

While it is true that the initial formulation of the puzzle arose from my unsystematic observations while following the recent conflict in the region, I subsequently prioritized adopting a systematic approach to verify the phenomenon as a matter of fact. Specifically, to substantiate the claim that Hezbollah tends to wear uniforms more consistently than Hamas, I conducted an observational analysis using direct combat footage publicly available on the subreddit [r/CombatFootage](#). [r/CombatFootage](#) is a subreddit dedicated to sharing and discussing real, unfiltered combat footage from conflicts around the world. [r/CombatFootage](#) stands out from traditional media sources by providing unfiltered, raw footage directly from the battlefield. This approach offers a more authentic and unmediated portrayal of combat. The subreddit aggregates footage from a variety of sources, including soldiers, militants, drones, and even civilians, giving a broader and fuller view of conflicts. This diversity of perspectives is often absent from traditional outlets, which may filter or bias their content based on editorial policies.

To gather data, I searched for " Hamas " within the subreddit and systematically examined approximately 60 videos. From this pool, I archived 30 videos in which Hamas militants were clearly visible in combat situations. Within these 30 videos, I recorded instances of attire to determine whether the fighters were wearing uniforms or civilian clothing. It is important to note that the majority of the videos I watched could not be used because Hamas and Hezbollah militants were either not clearly visible or their attire was indistinguishable. Many combat videos on r/CombatFootage focus on indirect engagements, such as drone strikes, artillery fire, or distant firefights where individual combatants cannot be identified. As a result, my observations are limited to instances where militants could be clearly seen.

The results were as follows: in 22 out of the 30 videos, Hamas militants were seen wearing civilian clothing, while in only 8 videos, they were observed wearing uniforms (see Appendix 1). This data suggests that Hamas militants more frequently engage in combat while dressed in civilian clothing rather than standardized military uniforms. Expanding on the same methodology, I conducted a similar analysis for Hezbollah. After reviewing most of the available footage, I compiled and archived 21 videos that clearly depicted Hezbollah fighters. The results showed a stark contrast to Hamas. Out of these 21 videos, Hezbollah militants were seen wearing uniforms in 17 of them (see Appendix 2). In only 3 videos were they observed wearing civilian clothing, and in one video, a militant was wearing a partial uniform – specifically, a bulletproof vest over civilian attire.

This comparison reinforces the claim that Hezbollah fighters adhere to a more consistent use of military uniforms in combat, whereas Hamas militants more frequently operate in civilian clothing. The significant disparity in (non)uniform usage suggests differing organizational structures, combat doctrines, or strategic priorities between the two groups. While Hamas's reliance on civilian clothing may reflect its asymmetric warfare tactics and urban-based insurgency, Hezbollah's more frequent use of uniforms aligns with its structured, paramilitary identity and its engagement in conventional military operations.

This thesis finds that the divergent use of military uniforms by Hezbollah and Hamas reflects distinct strategic calculations shaped by each group's political position, geographic environment, and organizational identity. Hezbollah's adoption of state-like uniforms is consistent with its broader strategy to present itself as a disciplined, legitimate military actor within Lebanon and beyond. This approach supports its political ambitions and allows it to align more closely with

international norms of armed conflict. Moreover, Hezbollah's operational environment, primarily the more rural and less densely populated areas of Southern Lebanon, limits its ability to embed within civilian populations or use human shields to the same extent as Hamas. Moreover, Hezbollah must also distinguish itself from the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), with whom it coexists within Lebanon; wearing standardized military attire helps prevent confusion and asserts its identity as a parallel but distinct military force. Hamas, on the other hand, intentionally avoids wearing military uniforms because of its operational environment, which maximizes combat effectiveness and makes Israeli military responses more difficult. Additionally, because of Israeli blockades, Hamas operates under resource conditions that are irregular and frequently disrupted. The group's capacity to regularly formalize its forces has been hampered by this unstable resource environment, which has led to a decentralized and indirect military culture that places less emphasis on uniforms. At the same time, Hamas does not face the same legitimacy constraints as Hezbollah, as it already garners wide international recognition through both political representation and popular protest movements.

This thesis is structured as follows: following this introduction, the next chapter provides a literature review on Hamas, Hezbollah, insurgency, and the laws of armed conflict. Then follows the methodology chapter, which details the research design, data collection methods, and analytical framework, which posits the dependent and independent variables. This is followed by the analysis section, where the independent variables are analyzed more closely. Specific case studies, including the attire worn during the October 7th attacks, interactions with opposing forces, and tactical measures like tunnel systems and human shields, are thoroughly examined. The analysis also considers external influences such as the amount of sponsor support, and questions of legitimacy. This is then followed by the discussion where we go over the main findings and address problematic alternative explanations. The discussion also includes the limitations and challenges that came up during the writing process. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the key contributions of the thesis and offers closing remarks.

Methodologically, this study uses open-source combat footage to conduct visual content analysis. Furthermore, this study relies on academic and news articles, reports, and topographical maps. Moreover, I conducted two expert interviews with regional security and conflict specialists to deepen the analysis and validate interpretive claims. This thesis contributes to the existing

literature by addressing a gap in studies that explore how non-state actors navigate norms of war not solely for legal compliance but as part of a broader military strategy. Crucially, this thesis demonstrates how environmental differences and external pressures, such as geography, civilian density, international recognition, and state coexistence, profoundly shape the behavior and visual identity of insurgent militant groups.

## **2. Literature Review**

The role of militant groups in modern warfare has received significant scholarly attention, particularly in the context of insurgencies, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism. Extensive research exists on guerrilla tactics and asymmetric warfare, particularly focusing on the moral implications and reasons behind fighters wearing military uniforms (Chiu 2010; Dupuy 1939; Steinhoff 2011). However, less attention has been given to why certain militant groups adopt military uniforms in very similar conflict settings while others do not. Groups like Hezbollah and Hamas are non-state actors that blend military and political strategies, often blurring the distinction between combatants and civilians. This ambiguity raises important questions about the role of uniforms in their operations and how these choices influence their strategies and public perceptions.

### **2.1 The Importance of Uniforms**

Uniforms have not always been standard in military contexts; the practice of outfitting national militias in coordinated attire in the Western world dates back only to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Chiu 2010: 45). Oliver Cromwell was among the first to dress his militia in uniform, using this visual standard to reinforce military professionalism and discipline (Chiu 2010: 45). Today, rules of engagement require a clear distinction between civilians and combatants. Under subparagraph 4A(1) of the Geneva Convention article 4 there is outlined an obligation to distinguish: to better protect civilians, members of armed forces are required to distinguish themselves from the civilian population during military operations (IHL Databases 1949). According to customary international humanitarian law, combatants who fail to set themselves apart from civilians during an attack, or in preparation for an attack, forfeit their entitlement to prisoner-of-war status (IHL Databases 1949). This does not only apply to fighters of insurgency groups – it is a longstanding rule of customary international law that combatants captured while

engaged in espionage, who are wearing civilian attire, are not entitled to prisoner-of-war status either (IHL Databases 1949).

From a moral perspective, Chiu (2010: 44) argues that by blurring the lines between combatants and civilians the insurgency groups are endangering civilians by implicating them in the fighting. This takes away civilians' immunity and forces them to participate in the fighting (Chiu 2010: 44). This view is strongly contested by researchers like Steinhoff (2011: 62), who argues that by not wearing uniforms, fighters do not compel civilians to "participate" in the fighting. Steinhoff suggests that "participation" implies active involvement – such as firing weapons, handling ammunition, or directly supporting combat operations, etc. rather than simply being nearby or mistaken for nonuniformed fighters (Steinhoff 2011: 62). He uses the example of infants killed in conflict: though many infants tragically lose their lives due to enemy action, this does not imply they are participants in the hostilities (Steinhoff 2011: 62).

Dupuy (1939: 144) notes that a defining feature of guerrilla groups is their ability to blend in as non-combatants at will. This enables guerrilla fighters to conduct sudden local raids and quickly disappear afterward, making it nearly impossible for their adversary to distinguish between non-uniformed combatants and civilians. As a result, soldiers may come to view all people in a conflict zone as potential combatants – a reasonable but challenging response given their need to target only actual combatants, often with increased caution and personal risk (Chiu 2010: 55). Civilians, therefore, may inadvertently be identified as combatants, compromising the autonomy of those who otherwise aim to remain uninvolved in the conflict (Chiu 2010: 55).

## **2.2 Hamas**

When first talking about what Hamas militants wear, we must first establish what the organization is and what it stands for. Hamas was founded in response to several key factors. Frustration with Israeli occupation had been mounting, particularly after the 1967 Six-Day War, when Israel took control of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. Many Palestinians, especially younger generations, saw armed resistance as the most viable strategy for challenging Israeli rule. Furthermore, Hamas aimed to set itself apart from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which had long controlled Palestinian politics with a nationalist and primarily secular agenda. Hamas presented the conflict in a religious context, calling for the creation of an Islamic state

encompassing all of historic Palestine, in contrast to the PLO, which later supported a two-state solution.

### 2.2.1 The Formation of Hamas

On December 8, 1987, a traffic accident in the Gaza Strip involving an Israeli truck and Palestinian workers resulted in multiple deaths, sparking riots that quickly spread and developed into what became known as the First Intifada (Abu-Amr 1993: 10). The following day, key members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza convened to discuss how to leverage the incident to mobilize religious and nationalist sentiments and ensure widespread public demonstrations (Abu-Amr 1993: 10).

As a result, Hamas emerged as an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which had been active in Palestine but had previously focused on social and religious activities rather than armed resistance. On December 14, 1987, the Brotherhood's leadership released a statement urging Palestinians to rise against the Israeli occupation (Abu-Amr 1993: 10). Hamas was founded from within the Brotherhood specifically to engage in armed resistance against Israel (Abu-Amr 1993: 5). Supporters saw Hamas as arriving at a critical moment to prevent the Palestinian national struggle from what they perceived as total capitulation to Israel (Hroub 2006: 15). Hamas rejected any peace agreements that required Palestinian recognition of Israel's right to exist (Hroub 2006: 15). This marked the beginning of the political resurgence of Islamist forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, challenging both Israeli occupation and the secular nationalist leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (Abu-Amr 1993: 5). Over time, Hamas and the PLO, particularly its dominant faction, Fatah, clashed both politically and militarily. One of the most intense confrontations occurred after the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, in which Hamas won a majority, defeating Fatah. The subsequent struggle for control escalated into violent clashes, culminating in the 2007 conflict in Gaza, where Hamas forcibly expelled Fatah forces and took control of the territory. Since then, the PLO has governed only the West Bank, while Hamas has maintained authority over Gaza.

Hamas quickly surpassed its parent organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, in influence and presence (Abu-Amr 1993: 5). By employing a combination of military operations, educational initiatives, social and charitable programs, and religious outreach, it established itself as a

dominant force among Palestinian communities both inside and outside of Palestine (Hroub 2006: 15). Simultaneously, its armed wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, carried out attacks targeting both Israeli military and civilian areas. Over time, Hamas solidified its position as a key player in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, actively participating in political processes while continuing armed resistance and refusing to recognize Israel. The growing rivalry between Hamas's Islamist movement and the leadership of the PLO extends beyond opposition to Israeli occupation. Even if Israeli rule were to end, this struggle for leadership and the future direction of the Palestinian people would likely persist (Abu-Amr 1993: 5-6).

### 2.2.2 The (non)Use of Uniforms by Hamas

Hamas, particularly its armed wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, employs a strategic approach to uniforms, shifting between military attire and civilian clothing depending on operational needs. Hamas combatants are frequently spotted in uniform military fatigues, usually in green or black, with insignia, tactical vests, boots, and headbands that identify them as group members in formal contexts like parades, propaganda videos, and training exercises. Hamas's attempts to portray itself as a respectable military organization are strengthened by this official military appearance, which gives the impression of a well-coordinated and disciplined fighting force (McFarlane 2023). Hamas, however, usually forgoes standard uniforms during active combat in favor of civilian attire or a combination of military and civilian gear. This tactic aligns with guerrilla warfare principles, enabling fighters to blend into densely populated urban areas, evade detection, and complicate targeting by opposing forces. According to reports, Hamas fighters have been observed patrolling streets in civilian attire, particularly after Israeli airstrikes, making it difficult to distinguish them from non-combatants (United Nations 2009: 120-121). This raises concerns under international law, as the laws of armed conflict require combatants to wear distinctive insignia to separate themselves from civilians and minimize harm to non-combatants (United Nations 2009: 120-121).

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) (2023) argue that Hamas deliberately wears civilian clothing during combat to make it harder to distinguish them from non-combatants, thus increasing the likelihood of civilian casualties and subsequently blaming Israel for indiscriminate attacks. The IDF alleges that this tactic serves as a propaganda tool, as Hamas can portray its fallen fighters as innocent civilians, influencing international media narratives (Israel Defense Forces 2023). Furthermore, Hamas has also been accused of wearing IDF uniforms in some operations, likely to cause confusion among Israeli soldiers and delay their response time in engagements (White 2014: 10). Reports suggest that Hamas has systematically used medical facilities, vehicles, and even uniforms as cover for its operations, in violation of the Law of Armed Conflict (United Nations 2009: 117-118). This includes the use of ambulances bearing Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems and hospitals as command centers (United Nations 2009: 117-118).



Figure 1: Hamas hostage release (BBC photo 2025)

Propaganda plays a crucial role in modern warfare, and Hamas appears to be hyperaware of the importance of its visual representation (McFarlane 2023). In carefully staged propaganda videos – such as those released during recent hostage exchanges (Borger 2025) – Hamas militants are often shown wearing full military uniforms, heavily armed, and highly organized. These images are designed to convey a specific message: despite Israel’s military operations, Hamas remains operational, intact, and capable of resisting (see Figure 1). While the group often presents itself in professional military attire in heavily produced propaganda videos, in combat situations, it takes on a more irregular appearance, sometimes wearing civilian clothes to blend into urban

environments (McFarlane 2023). This dual approach demonstrates the significance of image in warfare, as Hamas seeks to control how it is perceived by both its supporters and the international community (McFarlane 2023). Ultimately, Hamas's approach to uniforms is not just a matter of military practicality but also a strategic decision with significant implications for both combat effectiveness and information warfare.

## **2.3 Hezbollah**

Hezbollah has always presented itself as a Shi'a Islamist organization dedicated to opposing Israeli occupation and advancing Iran's political system. In addition to its social programs, Hezbollah established a strong military branch that waged guerrilla warfare and attacked Israeli troops and their supporters in Lebanon. While Hezbollah often portrays itself as a resistance movement, this characterization does not fully capture its complexity. Hezbollah operates in three distinct capacities: first, as a self-proclaimed resistance force against Israel; second, as an Islamist political movement that participates in Lebanon's political landscape and frequently engages in disputes with rival non-Shi'a parties; and third, as a revolutionary entity rooted in Iran's Wilayat al-Faqih ideology, which aspires to establish an Islamic state governed by clerical rule (Abdul-Hussain 2009: 68). Despite facing international sanctions and being designated as a terrorist organization by countries such as the United States, Canada, and Israel, Hezbollah remains a dominant force in Lebanon's military, political, and social spheres.

### **2.3.1 The Formation of Hezbollah**

Hezbollah emerged as a direct consequence of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, an operation aimed at dismantling the PLO and installing a pro-Israel government in Beirut (Norton 2007: 476). However, the invasion had far-reaching consequences beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly for Lebanon's Shi'a community, which had long been marginalized (Norton 2007: 476). At the time, Amal was the dominant Shi'a political and militant group, advocating for reform and Lebanese sovereignty, but the inspiration of Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution and the presence of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Lebanon soon led to the formation of a new, more radical Shi'a movement (Norton 2007: 476). The IRGC played a crucial role in training and organizing Hezbollah's early ranks, particularly in Baalbek, where Pasdaran forces helped establish Hezbollah as an armed resistance movement (Abdul-Hussain 2009: 68). Unlike Amal, which pursued secular reformist policies, Hezbollah viewed Lebanon's political

system as corrupt and irredeemable, aligning itself with Iran's doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih* or "rule of the jurist" (Norton 2007: 476). From its inception, Hezbollah also rejected Western influence and Israeli presence in Lebanon, framing its struggle as part of a broader Islamic revolution (Abdul-Hussain 2009: 68).

By 1985, Hezbollah had solidified its ideological and military presence, setting itself apart from Amal, which had initially dominated the Lebanese Shi'a scene. When Amal launched its "war of the camps" with Syrian backing to suppress a resurgence of Palestinian forces, Hezbollah opposed this move, siding with the Palestinians and positioning itself as their protector (Norton 2007: 476). Despite these ideological differences, Hezbollah and Amal continued to compete for influence over the Shi'a community, engaging in violent clashes throughout the late 1980s, particularly in southern Lebanon and the Shi'a-majority suburbs of Beirut. Eventually, under Syrian mediation, the two factions reached an uneasy political understanding, though Hezbollah's influence had by then far surpassed Amal's (Norton 2007: 477).

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Hezbollah evolved from a militant resistance movement into a complex entity operating both as an armed force and a political party. Its military wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, engaged in asymmetric warfare against Israeli forces occupying southern Lebanon. Hezbollah's guerrilla tactics were instrumental in forcing Israel's withdrawal in May 2000, a moment that marked the group's transition from an underground militia to a dominant power in Lebanon (Haddad 2006: 21). At the same time, Hezbollah invested heavily in social services, clinics, and infrastructure projects, filling the vacuum left by the Lebanese state and further solidifying its support base (Norton 2007: 478).

However, Hezbollah's ambitions extended beyond Lebanon's borders. The Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 forced the group to reorient its strategy, leading it to become more directly involved in Lebanese politics while maintaining its regional alliances with Iran and Syria (Abdul-Hussain 2009: 68). Hezbollah also continued its military operations, launching sporadic attacks against Israel and engaging in cross-border skirmishes. This culminated in the 2006 Lebanon War, which saw Hezbollah fight a 34-day conflict with Israel. In recent years, Hezbollah has maintained its dual identity as both a political party and an armed resistance movement, intervening in conflicts beyond Lebanon's borders. Its support for the Assad regime in Syria during the Syrian Civil War reaffirmed its commitment to Iranian regional strategy, even as this intervention sparked criticism

from some Lebanese factions (Abdul-Hussain 2009: 68). Though Hezbollah remains a polarizing force within Lebanon, its ability to balance military strength, political maneuvering, and social services has solidified its status as a state within a state, ensuring its continued dominance in Lebanese politics (Haddad 2006).

### 2.3.2 The Use of Uniforms by Hezbollah

Hezbollah maintains a more structured approach to military uniforms compared to other non-state actors like Hamas. The group's armed wing, the Islamic Resistance, functions as a highly organized force that often resembles a conventional army in both structure and conduct on the battlefield. This is also evident in its use of uniforms, which tend to be more consistent and standardized than those of many other militant groups. Hezbollah soldiers are divided into two categories: full-time and part-time soldiers. The number of regular soldiers, estimated at around 1,000 in 2006, has increased to approximately 20,000, with 5,000 having undergone advanced training in Iran (Shapir 2017: 70). These soldiers wear uniforms and unit tags, although it remains unclear whether they have specific ranks or symbols on their uniforms, complicating the understanding of their organizational structure (Shapir 2017: 70). Additionally, Hezbollah maintains a reserve force of an estimated 15,000 to 70,000 men, with the variance likely due to the fact that not all reserve soldiers are fit for combat (Shapir 2017: 70).

Hezbollah fighters are typically seen wearing military fatigues in green or khaki, closely resembling those of national armies. Additionally, fighters are frequently equipped with tactical vests, helmets, and boots, further enhancing their military appearance. This level of uniformity is especially visible during organized events such as parades, training exercises, and in official propaganda material. This practice aligns with Hezbollah's military doctrine, which combines elements of conventional warfare with guerrilla tactics. The group's strong ties with Iran and access to military training have played a significant role in shaping this disciplined approach, making Hezbollah more closely resemble a state-backed military force rather than an irregular insurgency. In 2014, Hezbollah introduced a new all-black uniform line, which made its debut during a rally in a Beirut suburb. The uniforms, noted for their "ninja-like" appearance, include black combat gear such as bulletproof vests, face masks, and helmets, worn by special forces patrolling the streets of Beirut (Ruble 2014). These new outfits have sparked attention on social media, with some expressing concern about the potential for overheating due to the black fabric

(Ruble 2014). However, there are instances when Hezbollah fighters operate in less formal attire, particularly in urban and asymmetric warfare settings where blending into local populations or avoiding detection is beneficial. In these scenarios, fighters may wear civilian clothing or a mix of civilian and military gear, although this tactic is less common compared to groups like Hamas.

#### **2.4 Tactics of insurgency groups**

Understanding the operational dynamics of insurgency groups is essential for analyzing asymmetric conflicts and irregular warfare. While the motivations and ideologies of insurgent movements may differ across regions, many share common strategic patterns and tactical approaches. Insurgency has evolved into a highly sophisticated form of warfare over the past 30 years, with many of the conventional rules of engagement being either distorted or entirely inapplicable (Daskal 1986: 28). Historically, insurgencies have existed for centuries, with early examples found in Sun Tzu's writings 2,500 years ago, as well as conflicts involving the Scots, Irish, and the Spanish against Napoleon (Daskal 1986: 28). Modern insurgencies, however, have become more prominent due to the increasing costs associated with conventional warfare. Advanced military equipment, such as fighter aircraft and modern tanks, requires immense financial and logistical resources, making large-scale conventional warfare unsustainable for many actors seeking power (Daskal 1986: 28). In contrast, insurgent groups can achieve significant military impact with cost-effective weapons, such as shoulder-fired missiles capable of neutralizing aircraft and armored vehicles. These weapons, combined with secrecy and maneuverability, allow insurgents to challenge conventional forces despite their technological inferiority (Daskal 1986: 30). Ultimately, modern insurgencies have adapted to asymmetric warfare through strategic, tactical, and political means. Whether through the use of civilian clothing to evade detection, intelligence operations to enhance effectiveness, or military strategies that incorporate guerrilla tactics and rocket warfare, groups like Hamas and Hezbollah have demonstrated the evolving nature of insurgency in contemporary conflicts.

This modern evolution of insurgency helps explain a growing puzzle in the history of asymmetric warfare: why do strong actors lose? Since Thucydides, the foundational assumption in international relations theory has been that power correlates with victory, that the stronger actor should prevail in war (Arreguín-Toft 2001: 96). While this expectation generally holds true, the empirical record presents two key anomalies. First, weak actors have won nearly 30 percent of

asymmetric wars over the last two centuries, a surprisingly high number given the vast disparities in power (Arreguín-Toft 2001: 96). Second, these weak actor victories have become more frequent over time, despite structural factors like military imbalance remaining constant (Arreguín-Toft 2001: 96).

Arreguín-Toft's theory of strategic interaction posits that these outcomes are driven by mismatches in strategic approaches. Strong actors tend to employ direct strategies, while weak actors rely on indirect methods, such as guerrilla warfare or subversion, which exploit the vulnerabilities of conventional forces (Arreguín-Toft 2001: 122). For weak actors, indirect strategies are often the only viable option and depend heavily on public support, physical or political sanctuary, and a prolonged conflict timeline that favors attrition over decisive victories (Arreguín-Toft 2001: 122). Conversely, strong actors may face limits on their willingness to escalate or sustain long conflicts, especially when their national survival is not at stake (Arreguín-Toft 2001: 96).

This logic is echoed in Mack's analysis of post-World War II conflicts, where technologically superior states repeatedly failed to defeat nationalist insurgencies on foreign soil (Mack 1975: 195). Unlike the colonial wars of the 19th century, where minimal force often secured quick victories, modern conflicts saw industrial powers deploy massive resources only to suffer strategic defeat. Because insurgents lacked the capacity to defeat stronger actors militarily, victory came not through force but through delegitimizing and exhausting their opponents (Mack 1975: 195).

#### 2.4.1 Examples of Insurgency Tactics in Mali and Afghanistan

Recent examples from Mali and the broader Sahel region illustrate how insurgent groups adapt these principles to local contexts. Since the launch of the Tuareg rebellion in 2012, violent extremist organizations (VEOs) have operated with increasing intensity (Fournier 2020: 4). Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM), an umbrella group of multiple insurgent factions, currently operates across much of Mali, while the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara exerts influence in the tri-border region shared by Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger (Fournier 2020: 4). These groups have prioritized irregular (guerrilla) warfare over conventional confrontation – their tactics include ambushes using small arms and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIEDs), and complex, multi-layered attacks aimed at destabilizing local governance and asserting control (Fournier 2020: 4).

Access to geographical lines of communication and proximity to civilian populations are critical to the operational effectiveness of these insurgents. The former enables mobility and logistical coordination, while the latter provides intelligence, recruitment, food, and shelter (Fournier 2020: 4). VEOs often deploy local overseers to monitor and control village populations, or they move freely through undefended areas to preach ideology, impose Sharia law, and extract resources (Fournier 2020: 4). Effective counterinsurgency (COIN) strategies aim to deny insurgents access to civilian populations by placing static security forces in key areas (Fournier 2020: 4). By isolating insurgents from communities, COIN operations diminish their ability to recruit, gather intelligence, and maintain legitimacy (Fournier 2020: 4).

Afghanistan provides a particularly rich case study for understanding insurgent behavior, with the Taliban offering a highly developed model of insurgent warfare. The Taliban frequently warned civilians in advance of planned attacks near populated areas, a tactic that simultaneously reduced civilian casualties and signaled operational control (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 4). Civilians fleeing from a village often served as an early warning sign of an impending attack, which was typically initiated by groups of armed men arriving by pickup trucks or motorcycles (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 4). While such behavior was less frequent in urban environments where the Taliban had fewer supporters and more informants, there were notable exceptions, such as the 2008 Sarpoza Prison attack in Kandahar, which was preceded by civilian warnings (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 4).

In tactical terms, Taliban ambushes usually began with rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), followed by small arms fire (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 4). Most operations were designed to be brief and effective, with insurgents retreating before air support could arrive. As the conflict intensified in 2007 and 2008, Taliban forces increasingly relied on IEDs, often integrating them into ambush tactics to initiate an attack and then withdrawing under cover of fire (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 4). In cultivated and populated areas such as Helmand province, Taliban fighters often split into small mobile groups to evade detection – they used local homes for cover, increasing the risk to civilians, and frequently concealed their weapons during the day, retrieving them at night (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 7). Urban or village-based operations sometimes involved the use of mosques as firing positions or the employment of human shields (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 11). In one instance near Sangin in 2008, Taliban insurgents detonated IEDs from

within a mosque; in another case, women and children were used as cover during a firefight (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 11).

Moreover, insurgents often carried minimal ammunition, relying on short engagements (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 46). If their positions were threatened, they abandoned weapons and posed as civilians (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 46). Bridges and chokepoints were frequently mined, and buildings containing civilians were used as firing positions – further demonstrating the extent to which Taliban operations blurred the lines between combatants and non-combatants (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 46).

It is important to note that while the Taliban's operational environment offers valuable insights into insurgent tactics, it is not universally applicable. The Taliban's ability to operate in rural, mountainous regions with space for civilians to flee or avoid direct conflict stands in stark contrast to other insurgent theaters. In this regard, their operational environment is more closely aligned with that of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, as both groups benefit from complex terrain, sympathetic or controlled civilian populations. In densely populated areas like Gaza, however, the operational dynamics are fundamentally different. Civilians have extremely limited options for evacuation or displacement due to geographic, political, and logistical constraints. As a result, tactics that depend on the assumption that civilians can freely move, such as strategies aimed at separating insurgents from the population or interpreting civilian flight as a sign of impending attack, become significantly less viable.

## **2.5 Hiding**

Insurgents work in difficult environments, frequently hiding in isolated, unreachable areas (Daskal 1986: 30). This tactic is best demonstrated by Hamas' vast network of tunnels under Gaza, which enable its members to sneak weapons, launch surprise attacks, and avoid Israeli surveillance. Known as "Gaza Metro," these tunnels are used for both offensive and defensive objectives. They allow cross-border infiltrations into Israel and give Hamas covert routes for transporting supplies and personnel. Hezbollah's military strategy also includes the use of an advanced tunnel system. The tunnels used by Hezbollah are positioned strategically throughout southern Lebanon, particularly along the Israeli border. They are used as places for fighters to hide, to store weapons, and to launch attacks.

## **2.6 Civilian clothing as a prerequisite**

By avoiding traditional uniforms, militants can blend into local populations, making it difficult for conventional military forces to identify and target them. This tactic is particularly effective in urban combat, where fighters can execute ambushes, engage in guerrilla warfare, and disappear into crowds before facing retaliation. Moreover, the use of civilian clothing is not just a tactic in itself but a necessary prerequisite for other, more impactful strategies such as suicide bombings and targeted assassinations. Suicide bombers rely on civilian attire to bypass security measures and infiltrate high-value targets, including military bases, government buildings, and densely populated civilian areas, maximizing the effectiveness of their attacks. These tactics have had severe consequences in conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation, where between 2000 and 2005, suicide bombings resulted in 86% of Israeli fatalities being civilians, with the majority of these attacks occurring within the Green Line (Frisch 2009: 1051).

In some instances, both Hezbollah and Hamas have been known to use even more unconventional disguises to blend into their environment and evade detection by their adversaries. One tactic used by Hezbollah fighters is wearing IDF uniforms. This allows them to infiltrate Israeli positions or ambush Israeli forces by pretending to be one of their own. This was a tactic used, for example, by Hamas during the October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks: articles from Israel's i24 News and The Sun in the U.K. reported that “the terrorists wore our uniforms” and that “sick Hamas terrorists used IDF uniform disguise” (McFarlane 2023). A video from the attacks appears to show a group of Hamas fighters wearing olive-green uniforms resembling those of the Israel Defense Forces (McFarlane 2023).

Similarly, both Hamas and Hezbollah have been known to dress as women, a tactic that capitalizes on the cultural norms and social restrictions within certain regions (an example of this can be seen in Appendix 1). By disguising themselves in this manner, militants can move undetected through civilian areas, bypassing checkpoints and evading searches. The use of women's clothing not only offers operational advantages in terms of surprise but also plays on the assumption that such individuals are less likely to be scrutinized by security forces, especially in regions where there are strict gender roles and sensitivities. Civilian disguise also helps intelligence-gathering operations by allowing operatives to monitor enemy movements, conduct reconnaissance, and gather information covertly.

The use of civilian attire has psychological and propaganda benefits in addition to tactical ones. State forces may be condemned internationally if insurgents are killed while posing as civilians because their deaths may be interpreted as attacks on non-combatants. It has been alleged that organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah intentionally use this technique to sway media perceptions and exert more political pressure on their enemies. Hezbollah and Hamas both use a hybrid political-military approach that allows them to operate as both political and armed groups at the same time. This dual role grants them legitimacy on the political landscape while also allowing them to maintain their ability to use violence when necessary.

## **2.7 Potential Explanations**

Understanding why two seemingly similar organizations adopt different approaches to uniforms requires an analysis of multiple factors. An important aspect to remember is that a different operational environment introduces different strategic and tactical considerations. One reason Hamas may avoid uniforms in certain combat scenarios is its reliance on irregular, asymmetric tactics, where blending into the civilian population provides a significant tactical advantage. The ability of guerrilla groups to blend in with civilians, as noted by Dupuy (1939: 144), makes it possible for fighters to vanish rapidly. This strategy is especially useful in urban areas because of the higher concentration of civilians. According to Arreguín-Toft (2001), weak actors in asymmetric conflicts win by avoiding symmetry entirely and adopting tactics that counteract the enemy's superior capabilities rather than by matching their opponents' strength. Avoiding uniforms makes sense for Hamas because it makes Israeli targeting procedures more difficult and deliberately erodes the principle of distinction established by international law. This tactic was also observed in counterinsurgency operations in Southern Afghanistan – in densely populated areas, insurgents frequently concealed their weapons, blended in with the civilian population, and waited until nightfall to retrieve their arms, capitalizing on the challenges of distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 7).

One such tactic used by the Taliban in Southern Afghanistan involved using civilian buildings, such as mosques, as fortified positions from which to conduct attacks, including the detonation of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) or ambushes (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 11). For example, During a kill-capture mission northeast of Sangin in 2006, insurgents protecting a high-ranking commander deliberately positioned women and children ahead of them, using them as shields

while firing over their heads at British forces (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 11). Meyerle and Malkasian (2009: 46) also point out that in Southern Afghanistan, insurgents often carried limited ammunition, which led to the rapid depletion of their resources during combat. When faced with advancing enemy forces, their typical response was to abandon their weapons and retreat to avoid capture (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 46). In instances where they were apprehended, insurgents adopted civilian identities to evade identification and potential punishment (Meyerle & Malkasian 2009: 46).

This approach can manipulate the environment in such a way that it increases the likelihood of civilian casualties, which may, in turn, serve to garner international sympathy and complicate the enemy's strategic objectives. By inflating civilian casualty figures, insurgent groups can garner increased sympathy and political support, while simultaneously delegitimizing opposing military forces. The urban environment, with its high population density and complex infrastructure, provides an ideal setting for such tactics, where the boundaries between civilian and combatant roles are often blurred.

As Galula (1964: 24) points out, insurgents tend to benefit when populations are more dispersed, as it becomes more difficult for counterinsurgents to control widespread rural areas. This is why counterinsurgency forces in regions like Malaya, Algeria, and South Vietnam have historically attempted to concentrate or "regroup" populations to limit insurgent mobility and support (Galula 1964: 24). For example, the OAS (Organisation Armée Secrète) in Algeria struggled tactically because its support base was largely concentrated in urban areas, particularly in cities like Algiers and Oran, making it vulnerable to counterinsurgency efforts (Galula 1964: 24). Furthermore, maintaining control in urban environments necessitates significant external resources, which is also why insurgents typically have a greater advantage when controlling rural populations (Galula 1964: 24).

Groups working in mountainous or rural areas, on the other hand, must take different tactical factors into account. Insurgent forces greatly benefit from rugged and challenging terrain, such as mountains, swamps, dense vegetation, or jungles; these settings offer natural cover (Galula 1964: 24). For example, insurgents can conduct ambushes and avoid direct confrontation with superior forces in hilly or mountainous areas (Galula 1964: 24). Similarly, densely vegetated regions, such as jungles or swamps, enhance the insurgents' ability to conceal their presence and limit the

enemy's maneuverability (Galula 1964: 24). Historical examples, such as the Chinese Communists in Manchuria during the Chinese Civil War, demonstrate how insurgents can exploit terrain features, such as fields of high vegetation, to gain tactical superiority (Galula 1964: 24). Additionally, the effectiveness of civilian disguise is diminished in sparsely populated areas due to the limited presence of civilians. Consequently, in such contexts, the incentive to avoid uniforms diminishes, and groups may prioritize the adoption of military-style uniforms to establish identity, discipline, and command structures.

Access to external financial resources also plays a key role in shaping the organizational capacity of non-state armed groups. Groups receiving substantial financial aid are better equipped to provide standardized uniforms, weapons, and training for their fighters. While both Hezbollah and Hamas receive backing from Iran, the scale and nature of this support differ significantly. Hezbollah benefits from a much larger and more consistent flow of financial resources, particularly from Iran, which enables the group to maintain a highly professionalized structure, including standardized uniforms, sophisticated weaponry, and extensive formal training for its fighters. This significant financial support contributes to Hezbollah's more formalized military appearance and disciplined organizational framework. In contrast, while Hamas also receives support from Iran, the level of financial assistance it receives is considerably smaller. As a result, Hamas faces more significant resource constraints, limiting its ability to provide standardized uniforms and military training for its fighters. Instead, Hamas tends to focus its limited resources on unconventional tactics, prioritizing mobility, stealth, and blending into civilian populations. These priorities are especially important in the densely populated urban environment of Gaza, where wearing uniforms would hinder its ability to operate effectively in hit-and-run tactics. Consequently, the lack of extensive external financial resources and the focus on irregular warfare help explain why Hamas does not adopt the same formal military structure as Hezbollah.

International humanitarian law, such as the Geneva Conventions, requires combatants to distinguish themselves from civilians to be granted lawful combatant status and certain protections (IHL Databases 1949, Article 4A(1)). According to customary international humanitarian law, combatants who fail to set themselves apart from civilians during an attack, or in preparation for an attack, forfeit their entitlement to prisoner-of-war status (IHL Databases 1949). Armed groups seeking greater international legitimacy or protection may be incentivized to adopt distinguishing

signs such as uniforms. Hezbollah's use of uniforms may reflect an attempt to adhere to these standards, thereby seeking legitimacy and protection under international humanitarian law. Here, Mack's (1975: 196) theory of asymmetry in will and interest becomes highly relevant. Mack contends that insurgent groups often derive strength not from parity of arms but from a stronger political will, especially when the state's commitment is weaker or externally constrained. This aligns with the observation that will and legitimacy, both domestic and international, can level the playing field even in materially unequal conflicts.

### 2.7.1 Hypothesis

It is important to recognize at the outset that no single variable alone can fully account for the variation in uniform use between Hezbollah and Hamas. Rather, this divergence is the result of multiple overlapping and interrelated factors that shape each group's strategic behavior. However, among these, I believe the most decisive factor is the operational environment and the tactical considerations that derive from it. The urban environment allows Hamas to exploit civilian density as a tactical shield, avoid detection, and conduct asymmetric operations such as ambushes or IED attacks with greater ease. In contrast, Hezbollah can rely less on these tactics as it operates largely in southern Lebanon's rural and semi-rural terrain. For Hezbollah, wearing uniforms serves multiple purposes in their operational environment – it also helps to distinguish them from the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which operates in the same geographic region. This differentiation is crucial for Hezbollah, which must maintain a distinct identity from the state military apparatus.

Another decisive factor is the difference in financial support from Iran. While both organizations receive Iranian backing, Hezbollah has historically enjoyed more consistent and substantial funding, enabling it to develop a more professionalized military structure that includes formal training, advanced weaponry, and standardized uniforms. Hamas, by contrast, has faced more intermittent support, limiting its ability to invest in widespread structural reforms, including the provisioning of uniforms.

In addition to these structural and environmental explanations, international recognition may also contribute to the variation. Although groups seeking global legitimacy may adopt uniforms to meet global standards and gain protection as lawful combatants, Hamas's relative insulation from international pressure, due to growing political support and sympathy, has made such alignment less necessary. This claim remains speculative: while one might argue that increased international

recognition has reduced Hamas's incentive to align with international humanitarian law, this cannot be reliably verified. Hamas was known to use human shields well before receiving broader political recognition, and there is no evidence to confirm whether such tactics have become more or less prevalent in recent years.

### 3. Methodology

For this thesis, I will be using the Most Similar Systems Design or MSSD, which is a comparative research method used to analyze two or more cases that are similar in many respects but differ in one crucial outcome or behavior. In this thesis, MSSD is ideal for studying Hezbollah and Hamas because they share numerous similar characteristics – yet they differ in the crucial outcome of interest: the choice of (non)use of uniforms. By applying MSSD, the thesis will focus on what distinguishes Hezbollah’s decision to regularly employ uniforms and Hamas’ tendency to avoid them, allowing us to isolate the factors driving this difference. The similarities between Hezbollah and Hamas, which will be controlled for in this study, include:

- **Islamic Ideology:** Both groups are rooted in Islamic religious-political ideologies. Hezbollah follows a Shi'a Islamist orientation closely aligned with Iran's concept of *Wilayat al-Faqih*, whereas Hamas is an offshoot of the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood. Despite sectarian differences, both embed their military and political activities in religious frameworks that mobilize popular support.
- **Anti-Israeli Resistance:** Hezbollah and Hamas both define themselves through their armed struggle against Israel. Resistance to Israeli military and political presence is central to their identity, operational goals, and legitimacy among their constituencies.
- **Non-State Actor Status:** Although both exercise significant control over territory, neither Hezbollah nor Hamas represents a fully sovereign state. They operate as powerful non-state actors that challenge state authority (Israel's, and in Hezbollah's case, also that of the Lebanese state) through political and military means.
- **External Sponsorship:** Significant outside assistance is provided to both groups, most notably by Iran. Financial assistance, military training, weapons, and ideological direction are all included in this support. The presence of external patrons influences their operational capacity and strategic decisions, but is a shared factor between the two cases.
- **Territorial Control and Governance:** Hamas controls the Gaza Strip, while Hezbollah controls portions of southern Lebanon. Both groups carry out governance functions in these areas, including policing, healthcare, and education. They blur the distinction between

military operations and civilian governance by maintaining military wings at the same time.

- **Hybrid Tactics:** Both groups use hybrid military tactics, which combine more traditional military operations (like organized rocket fire, fortified positions, and direct engagements with regular armies) with guerrilla warfare (like ambushes, IED attacks, and hit-and-run tactics).

Case	Actor	Ideology	Resistance	External support	Territorial control	Governance	Outcome: Use of mil uniform
Hezbollah	Non-state	Islamic	Israel	Iran	Yes	Yes	Very often
Hamas	Non-state	Islamic	Israel	Iran	Yes	Yes	Very rare

In line with MSSD, this study compares Hezbollah and Hamas, two non-state Islamic actors that exhibit a high degree of similarity across a range of key variables. As can be seen on the table, both organizations are engaged in armed resistance against Israel and share an Islamic ideological foundation. They receive substantial external support from Iran, maintain territorial control, and have developed governance structures within their respective areas of operation. These shared characteristics establish a strong basis for comparison by holding constant a range of potentially confounding factors. This is a strong setup for an MSSD approach, the two cases are strikingly similar in almost every relevant aspect: ideology, type of actor, resistance target, external backer, territorial control, and governance role. And yet, they differ sharply in the outcome variable: their use of military uniforms. Based on the independent variables, the study will test the hypothesis mentioned earlier. The goal is to isolate the independent variables that explain why Hezbollah adopts the use of uniforms while Hamas does not. These factors to be analyzed and tested include:

- **Geographical and Operational Environment:** as mentioned earlier by Dupuy (1939: 144), a defining feature of guerrilla groups is to blend in with civilians, as it allows fighters to disappear much quicker. This is much more advantageous in urban areas as there are more civilians around to blend into. In the mountainous regions of Southern Lebanon where Hezbollah operates, this tactic might not be the best choice. This variable can be checked with the use of maps of Southern Lebanon and Gaza to compare terrain types. Southern Lebanon's mountainous terrain contrasts sharply with Gaza's densely populated

urban landscape. This is also made possible by looking at the exact locations of the battles that have taken place. Moreover, this chapter will explore what Hamas fighters wore during the October 7th, 2023 attacks, assessing whether their behavior or uniform use adapts in response to a changing operational context, such as moving from defensive guerrilla tactics to large-scale offensive operations. The visual documentation of these conflicts, captured through bodycams, smartphones, and group-released propaganda, provides a rich set of primary visual data to analyze the intersection of terrain, strategy, and attire. Much of this footage is accessible via online platforms such as r/CombatFootage (referenced in the bibliography), though viewer discretion is advised due to graphic content. Finally, this chapter will consider how the presence of other military and paramilitary actors in the environment influences group behavior. For instance, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and their posture in Southern Lebanon may constrain or shape Hezbollah's tactical decisions.

- **Tactical Considerations:** For groups that rely on hit-and-run tactics or urban insurgency, not wearing uniforms enhances stealth and reduces the risk of being targeted. This could be checked with articles looking into tactical considerations of insurgency groups and how these considerations are implemented. Most of these tactical considerations stem directly from the operational environment, meaning they are closely connected. Urban density, terrain type, and civilian presence all shape the tactics that groups like Hamas or Hezbollah employ. For example, the IDF suggests that Hamas does not wear uniforms because when they are killed in combat, the Hamas-run Ministry of Health can count them as "civilian deaths" (Israel Defense Forces 2023). This can serve a strategic propaganda purpose. By inflating civilian death tolls, Hamas may garner increased sympathy and support from the international community while simultaneously portraying the IDF in a negative light. This tactic is particularly advantageous for Hamas in the densely populated urban environment of Gaza, where the line between combatants and civilians is often blurred. Conversely, if Hezbollah operates in a more rural and mountainous terrain, then distinguishing fighters from civilians is less relevant tactically. Additionally, to gauge the intent behind these tactical decisions, we will also examine public statements made by Hamas leaders, which can offer insight into how they view the strategic utility of such practices.

- **Amount of Support From Sponsors:** Although in my research design setup, both Hezbollah and Hamas are treated as receiving external support from the same primary sponsor, it is important to emphasize that the amount of support each group receives plays a significant role in shaping their behavior. Theoretically, groups with greater access to resources are more likely to embrace uniforms and a formalized military structure. Hezbollah has developed a highly skilled military apparatus thanks to Iran's significant and steady financial and military support. This includes having the capacity to provide its combatants with standardized uniforms, cutting-edge equipment, and structured training—all of which help to create a more cohesive military force. However, although Iran does support Hamas, it does so at a much lower level. This funding discrepancy might make it more difficult for Hamas to provide uniforms and other standardized military equipment to its forces. Examining publications and reports that detail the extent of military and financial assistance given to these organizations can help test this. We will also examine how this resource inequality contributes to the formation of the military culture and identity that employs human shields in this chapter. Hamas has frequently portrayed itself as a populist force fighting for the liberation of Palestine because of its desire for resistance and its Islamic nationalist foundation. Their narrative of a larger Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation, which frequently conflates the roles of combatants and civilians, is consistent with their use of civilian attire. Hezbollah, on the other hand, is more aligned with the concept of a state-like resistance movement and is more focused on presenting itself as a legitimate military actor. Its use of uniforms and military discipline reflects this more state-centric model. Hezbollah's access to consistent, substantial support from Iran has enabled the development of a more formal military hierarchy and alignment with international military norms. In contrast, Hamas's limited resources constrain its ability to build such formal structures, reinforcing its reliance on irregular tactics and civilian integration.
- **Legitimacy and Global Acknowledgment:** In this chapter, we discuss the role of legitimacy and international recognition in shaping the behavior of Hamas and Hezbollah. The methodology employed in this chapter is primarily qualitative and interpretive. First, the chapter evaluates how Hamas and Hezbollah are perceived in global discourse. Finally, the chapter incorporates international legal frameworks, specifically IHL obligations

regarding combatant distinction and civilian protection, to assess the implications of uniform use on legal accountability. The analysis will explore how Hamas's avoidance of uniforms serves both tactical and political purposes, especially in light of the media framing of civilian casualties. In contrast, Hezbollah's partial adoption of conventional military norms will be interpreted as part of a broader effort to solidify its political legitimacy within Lebanon and internationally. Later on in the discussion, we will go over the problematic aspects of this potential explanation.

### **3.1 Data Collection**

To support the comparative analysis in this thesis, I employed a number of both primary and secondary sources. The goal was to triangulate a wide range of evidence to better understand the tactical environments, operational choices, and structural dynamics of Hezbollah and Hamas.

For the assessment of operational environments, I rely on maps from secondary sources and satellite imagery to better understand the terrain in which each group operates. Examining the physical characteristics of southern Lebanon versus the Gaza Strip allows me to evaluate how landscape, urban density, rural openness, and proximity to civilian infrastructure shape the groups' behavior. Beyond terrain analysis, I drew on a variety of secondary and primary sources, including academic literature, quotes from the members of these groups, and conflict reports, to understand each group's structure and strategic posture. I incorporated insights from recognized regional analysis organizations such as the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), which provided timely translations and summaries of Arabic-language sources related to Hamas' public image.

One of the primary sources used in this thesis were clips of combat footage captured by journalists, militants themselves, and civilians from the online social media platform called Reddit. The evaluation of uniform use in various contexts, such as public parades or the battlefield, was also aided by media reports and visual documentation, such as news photos and propaganda. Claims regarding the frequency and context of uniform use were empirically supported by these visual sources.

Lastly, a few video interviews with regional experts added value to the study by helping to explain the organizational structures and placing behavioral patterns in context. Even though they were

few in number, these discussions gave the analysis important depth, especially when it came to interpreting behaviors that were difficult to explain by using only secondary or public sources. To conduct these interviews, approximately 30 subject-matter experts were contacted via email. Ultimately, only two agreed to participate in interviews: Professor Eyal Zisser, a leading scholar of Middle Eastern studies and Vice Rector at Tel Aviv University, and Joe Truzman, a senior research analyst at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies specializing in Palestinian militant groups and Middle Eastern conflict. The interviews were conducted via video call and followed a semi-structured format, allowing for open-ended responses (see Appendix 4 for the list of guiding questions).

## **4. Analysis**

This section explores the potential explanations or independent variables that we discussed previously. The analysis section examines how Hezbollah's operations in the rugged, sparsely populated terrain of southern Lebanon differ from Hamas's tactics in the densely populated urban setting of Gaza. Additionally, we will discuss the strategic considerations that both groups take into account and how these strategies affect the use of uniforms. A key focus will also be the resource gap between Hezbollah and Hamas, and the structural differences this creates in their operational capabilities and military strategies. Lastly, we will go over how global acknowledgment has potentially influenced the behavior of both groups. This will then be followed by the discussion.

### **4.1 Geographical and Operational Environment**

The geographical and operational environment plays a crucial role in shaping the military strategies of armed groups, including their decisions on whether to use uniforms. Hezbollah operates in the mountainous terrain of southern Lebanon, where blending in with civilians is less effective due to the sparse population and rugged landscape. In contrast, Hamas operates in Gaza, a densely populated urban environment where fighters can more easily integrate into the civilian population, offering significant tactical advantages. This chapter demonstrates how environmental differences help explain tactical variation between otherwise similar armed actors.

To better understand the terrain in which these groups operate, I have provided Figure 2, which shows a map providing a topographical overview of the Levant region. The elevation is color-coded, with the gradient key on the right showing elevation levels ranging from below sea level to high mountain ranges. The Mediterranean Sea borders the map to the west, while the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea form a significant geographical depression running north-south. The Jordan River itself plays a symbolic and political role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The phrase “from the river to the sea” refers to the territory stretching from the Jordan River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west, effectively encompassing all of Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. This phrase is controversial as Palestinian nationalist groups, including Hamas, have used it to assert a vision of a single Palestinian state across the entirety of the land.

The area outlined in red in the southwestern corner of the map represents the Gaza Strip, where Hamas primarily operates. This region is low-lying, as indicated by the light green coloring, and borders both Israel and Egypt. The flat terrain facilitates the construction of tunnels and rapid mobilization but also leaves the area vulnerable to aerial surveillance and military strikes. In the northwestern part of the map, outlined in purple, is southern Lebanon and the area near the Israeli border where Hezbollah operates. This region is marked by a mix of coastal plains and rugged mountainous terrain, indicated by the transition from green to yellow and red hues. The elevation provides Hezbollah with strategic advantages, including natural cover, elevated vantage points for surveillance and rocket launches, and challenging terrain for conventional military incursions.



Figure 2: Topographical map of the Levant region showing areas of operation of Hamas (outlined in red) and Hezbollah (outlined in purple) (Topographic-map 2025).

#### 4.1.1 Hezbollah and the Mountainous Terrain of Southern Lebanon

Since war erupted between Israel and Hamas in Gaza in October 2023, Israeli forces have also been engaged in near-daily clashes with Hezbollah along the northern border with Lebanon. Although these confrontations have so far remained geographically limited, many analysts warn that the pattern points toward dangerous escalation (Ghaddar et al. 2024). Several Hezbollah operations have exceeded prior norms of engagement, employing more advanced weaponry,

striking a broader range of military targets, and pushing the boundaries of what had previously been considered routine skirmishes (Ghaddar et al. 2024).

Battles between Hezbollah and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) typically occur along Lebanon's southern border with Israel, particularly in the region stretching from the Mediterranean coast near Tyre to the eastern sector near the contested Shebaa Farms area. These clashes are concentrated within the strip of territory between the Blue Line, the United Nations-demarcated boundary, and the Litani River. Despite UN Security Council Resolution 1701 calling for Hezbollah's withdrawal from this area after the 2006 war, the group maintains a strong operational presence there. Flashpoints frequently include towns like Kfar Kila, Aitaroun, Maroun al-Ras, and Bint Jbeil, as well as the Shebaa Farms region.

The terrain of southern Lebanon, marked by steep hills, deep valleys, and clusters of small villages, plays a central role in shaping Hezbollah's tactics. This rugged geography enables guerrilla warfare, providing natural cover for launching anti-tank missiles, small arms fire, or drone attacks before retreating into fortified or concealed positions (like Hezbollah's tunnel network). In response, the



Figure 3: illustration of the terrain in southern Lebanon (AP Photo/Sam McNeil 2024)

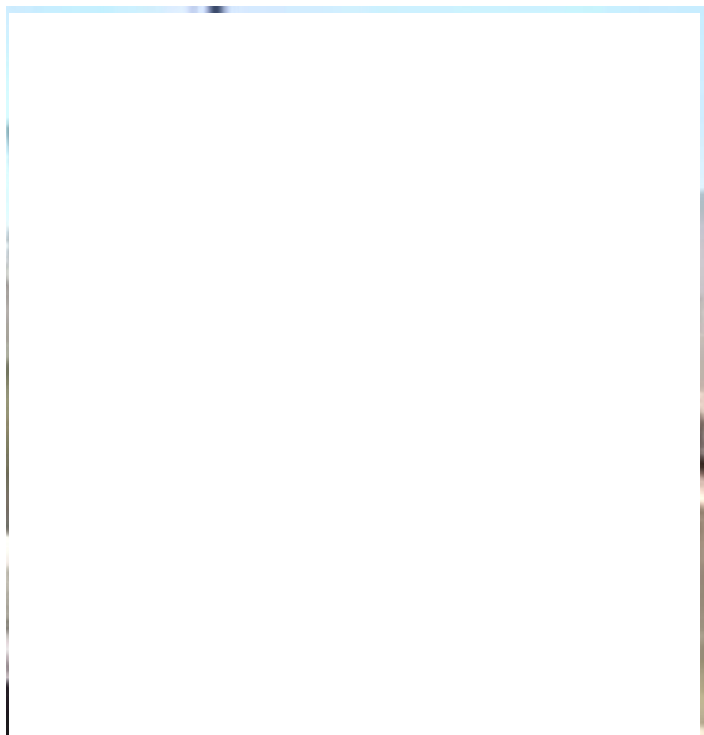


Figure 4: Screenshot from a video showing uniformed Hezbollah fighters ambushing an Israeli military patrol (Reddit 2024<sup>a</sup>).

IDF often employs artillery, drones, and airstrikes to target suspected Hezbollah infrastructure or launch sites.

Wearing a uniform in a mountainous region offers operational advantages that are less relevant and sometimes even counterproductive in flat, urban environments like Gaza. In rugged terrain, fighters may be dispersed across valleys, ridgelines, and forested areas, with limited visibility and communication. Uniforms assist in visual identification, reducing the risk of friendly fire and facilitating cohesion among dispersed units. In sparsely populated areas, blending into the civilian population provides minimal tactical advantage. For instance, along Lebanon's southern border, population density averages around 500 people per square kilometer (georef 2018), whereas in Gaza, it reaches approximately 6,000 people per square kilometer (Anera 2023). Instead, combatants benefit from being clearly distinguished both to each other and to civilians in the area. Additionally, fighters in mountainous terrain can rely on natural elements like rocks, vegetation, and caves for concealment, making the use of civilian clothing for stealth less necessary.

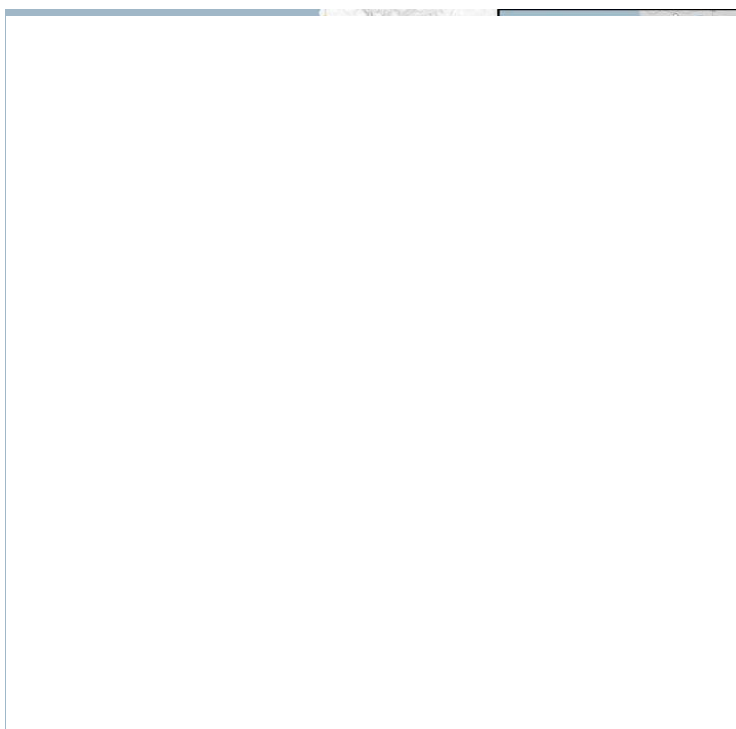


Figure 5: Israel's ground operations (BBC 2024)

As of November 2024, clashes between Hezbollah and Israeli forces have intensified across southern Lebanon, especially in the areas between the Israeli border and the Litani River. According to battlefield assessments, Israeli operations have included limited advances and targeted strikes north of the border, in regions such as Tyre and Nabatieh. The operational map (see Figure 5) reveals three primary zones: assessed Israeli advances (purple hatching), claimed advances (orange), and areas under Israeli evacuation warnings (yellow).

#### 4.1.2 Hamas and the Urban Environment of Gaza

In contrast to Hezbollah's operations in the mountainous terrain of Southern Lebanon, Hamas operates primarily within the densely populated and urbanized environment of Gaza. This urban landscape plays a critical role in shaping Hamas's operational strategies and explains its consistent choice to avoid wearing uniforms during combat. Gaza's extreme population density, estimated at around 6,000 people per square kilometer (Anera 2023), means that combat frequently takes place within civilian infrastructure. In such an environment, wearing identifiable military clothing would make Hamas

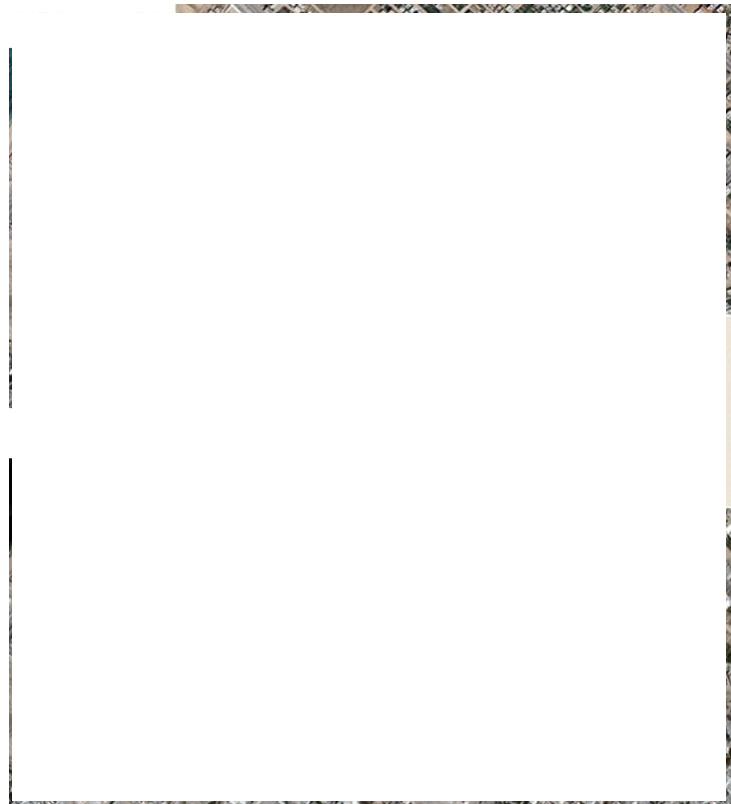


Figure 6: Illustration of the operational environment in Gaza (BBC 2023)

fighters stand out, increasing their vulnerability to Israeli surveillance and targeted strikes.

Urban warfare inherently rewards concealment, flexibility, and mobility. Combatants can move quickly between buildings, set up sniper positions or rocket launch sites, and retreat through dense urban corridors or tunnel networks. These features make it possible for Hamas to engage in hit-and-run tactics, launching attacks and then vanishing into the surrounding population. The physical constraints of the urban environment also make uniforms and heavy military gear less practical. Hamas militants in Gaza often need to navigate tight spaces, scale stairs, and move swiftly through cluttered alleyways – uniforms designed for open terrain or full tactical kits can become cumbersome and increase the risk of exposure in this environment.

This is especially relevant in multi-story urban combat. Fighting in Gaza often takes place on rooftops or within buildings, where militants must rapidly ascend or descend stairs. Tactical vests, plate carriers, and military gear are often heavy and restrict mobility. Running up and down multiple flights under fire becomes significantly more difficult when carrying such weight, which

is why many Hamas fighters opt for lighter equipment or civilian clothing. In contrast, during combat in rural or open terrain, soldiers must frequently dig trenches or rely on natural features for cover. In those environments, the use of plate carriers becomes more critical, as fighters are more exposed to direct fire and have fewer protective structures to shield them. In Gaza, however, militants can take cover inside reinforced buildings, many constructed from concrete, which offer inherent ballistic protection. As a result, the tactical advantage of heavy body armor is diminished. Additionally, the availability of hidden weapon caches

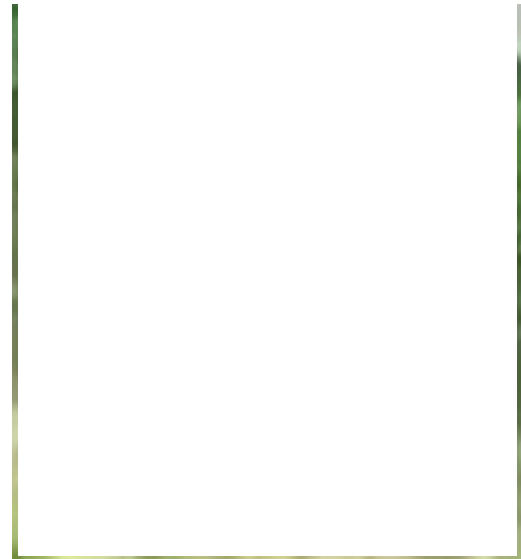


Figure 7: Screenshot showing a Hamas fighter in civilian clothing carrying an RPG (Reddit 2024<sup>b</sup>).

in civilian homes or other buildings means that fighters do not need to carry large quantities of ammunition or supplies. They can travel light, strike quickly, and resupply from pre-positioned stockpiles.

Hamas's use of civilian infrastructure to cover up military operations is another important aspect of their operational environment. Homes, schools, mosques, hospitals, and other civilian buildings have all been used by the group for its military activities. These are used as launch platforms, storage locations, and command centers in addition to shelters. Israeli forces find it more difficult to react without endangering civilians as a result of this integration, which blurs the boundaries between civilian and combatant areas. Additionally, it supports Hamas's larger information warfare strategy, which uses the humanitarian and visual effects of airstrikes on civilian buildings to damage Israel's reputation abroad.

A useful way to assess the impact of the operational environment on militant behavior is to examine how Hamas acts when operating outside its typical urban environment in Gaza, particularly in environments that more closely resemble those of Hezbollah. This offers a valuable comparative lens: if Hamas's behavior shifts in a different geographical setting, it underscores how heavily its choices are influenced by the environment rather than ideology or organizational structure alone. The following chapter explores this dynamic by analyzing Hamas's conduct during

the October 7<sup>th</sup> invasion of Israel, where the operational context contrasted sharply with Gaza's urban environment.

#### 4.1.3 What Was Worn on the October 7<sup>th</sup> Attacks

The October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, attack by Hamas marked a turning point in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, standing out both for its scale and for the nature of its execution. In a surprise assault, Hamas fighters breached the heavily fortified Gaza border, launching coordinated attacks on military outposts, civilian communities, and public gatherings across southern Israel. The unprecedented volume of video evidence captured by attackers, victims, and surveillance systems provides a uniquely detailed look at the tactics, organization, and behavior of Hamas forces during the operation. More importantly, it lets us see what Hamas members were wearing during these attacks. Extensive video evidence of the October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks is publicly available through a variety of sources. Notably, many firsthand videos and combat footage were circulated on platforms such as Reddit, particularly on the subreddit r/CombatFootage. Additional footage has surfaced through social media platforms, news outlets, and other open-source intelligence channels. During the October 7<sup>th</sup> operation, video evidence shows that a number of Hamas fighters wore coordinated uniforms. By focusing on this event, it becomes possible to analyze the specific conditions under which Hamas alters its typical behavior regarding uniform use.

On the morning of October 7, 2023, approximately 120 Hamas-led fighters launched a coordinated assault on the Erez border crossing and a nearby Israeli military base (Fabian 2025). The Israeli troops stationed there were quickly overwhelmed, and the facility fell into Hamas's control (Fabian 2025). During the attack, nine Israeli soldiers were killed, and three others were taken captive (Fabian 2025). Footage obtained from r/CombatFootage (Reddit 2024) shows security camera recordings from the Erez Crossing on October 7, 2023. In this video, members of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, can be seen breaching the crossing. The fighters are notably wearing black boots, black t-shirts, black pants, and carrying rifles. Many also appear to wear desert-camo or tan tactical vests (see



Figure 8: Screenshot showing a uniformed Hamas fighter at the Erez Crossing. (Reddit 2024<sup>e</sup>)

Figure 8). Later in the same video, additional footage from inside the Erez Crossing facility shows members of the al-Qassam Brigades continuing their assault. While some fighters are still wearing the previously described black uniforms and tactical vests, others appear to be dressed in ordinary civilian clothing (see Figure 9). The fighters, regardless of their attire, are seen vandalizing and destroying parts of the facility.

This contrast in appearance is significant. The presence of both uniformed and non-uniformed militants highlights the hybrid nature of Hamas's operational forces. It mainly points to an internal differentiation within Hamas itself. The organization is not monolithic in its structure; it consists of multiple sub-units and specialized groups, each with different roles and potentially distinct dress codes. For instance, the fighters seen on Figure 8 wearing all-black uniforms are often affiliated with the Nukhba, the special forces unit within Hamas's military wing trained for infiltration, close-quarters combat, and specialized operations. Conversely, other militants in civilian dress likely represent regular or irregular Qassam fighters or other allied operatives who operate under less formalized protocols.

One potential explanation for the use of uniforms by Hamas fighters during the October 7th attack is that they anticipated operating outside of the Gaza Strip, in a more sparsely populated and militarized environment where civilian clothing would no longer offer a tactical advantage. Once crossing into Israeli territory, where the civilian population was less dense and the likelihood of direct engagements with Israeli forces was high, uniforms could facilitate greater coordination, identification among units, and combat effectiveness. Thus, the decision to wear standardized clothing, including black boots, black shirts and pants, camouflage vests, and carrying rifles — as observed in security footage from the Erez crossing — may reflect a strategic adaptation to the changed operational environment.

This interpretation is further supported by the map of the attack — the gun battles, marked by red squares on the map (see Figure 10), primarily took place along the Gaza-Israel border, particularly near key crossing points such as Beit Hanoun/Erez Crossing and Kerem Abu Salem/Kerem Shalom

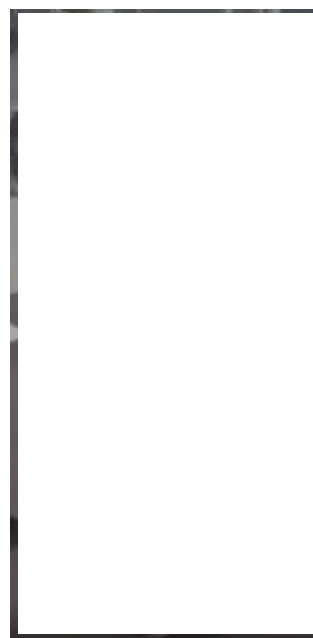


Figure 9: Screenshot showing a partially uniformed hamas member with what looks to be a tactical vest over civilian clothing at the Erez crossing (Reddit 2024<sup>o</sup>).

Crossing. These locations are flat, open areas with sparse urban development, dominated by agricultural fields, security fences, and scattered infrastructure like small villages and military outposts. Beit Hanoun/Erez Crossing is a major border terminal connecting northern Gaza to Israel, making it a strategic point for infiltration. The surrounding terrain is mostly flat, facilitating rapid movement but offering limited natural cover. Southern Gaza, near Kerem Shalom Crossing, similarly features flat agricultural lands and rural border communities (like kibbutzim and small towns). Gun battles here would have taken place in and around these lightly populated areas.

Furthermore, many of the individuals in the video were seen wearing military vests over ordinary civilian clothing. In areas outside of Gaza and in less urban environments, the use of a tactical vest is often preferred due to the practical limitations of carrying ammunition in civilian clothing. Wearing a vest allows individuals to efficiently carry ammunition and other essential gear, such as radios, medical kits, and tools, in easily accessible pouches. This is particularly important in regions where carrying a substantial amount of ammo in pockets would be both uncomfortable and impractical. At the same time, wearing civilian clothes underneath the vest allows the individual to quickly discard the vest if needed, enabling them to assume a civilian identity when necessary.

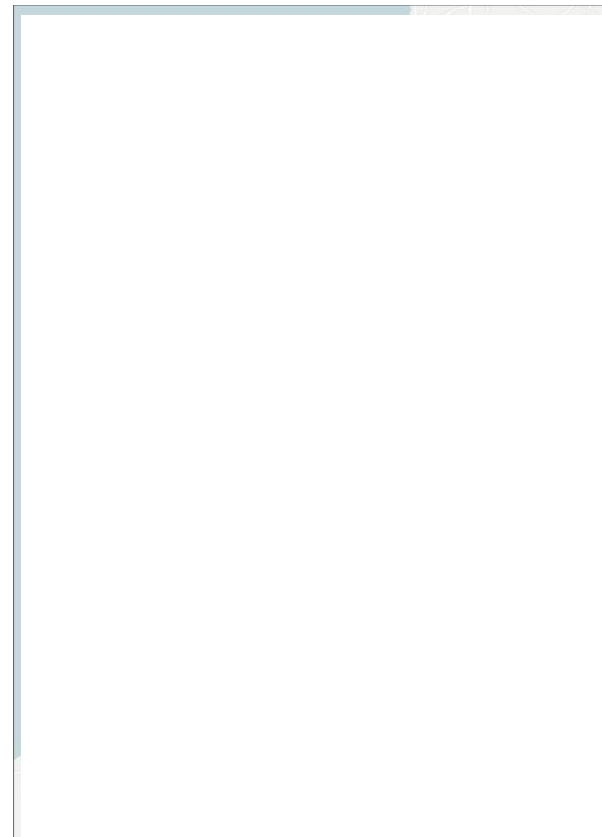


Figure 10: How the October 7<sup>th</sup> attack unfolded (Al Jazeera 2023)

During my interview with a military analyst, Joe Truzman (2025, Interview) points out that Hamas fighters were visibly uniformed during the October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks, signaling a deliberate strategic shift intended to project the image of a professional and organized military force. Truzman noted that this choice was likely motivated by Hamas's understanding of how global audiences, especially in the West, perceive uniformed combatants versus irregular fighters. Moreover, Truzman (2025, Interview) points out that the fighters' physical appearance, namely that most of the fighters were freshly clean-shaven and groomed, further underscores the level of preparation involved. This

suggests that Hamas not only anticipated extensive media coverage of the operation but actively choreographed its visual presentation for maximum propaganda value. As Truzman (2025, Interview) observed, the operation was planned with the knowledge that it would be recorded and disseminated widely, both for internal morale and external perception. Furthermore, the attacks were not only recorded by others but largely by Hamas members themselves, which further motivated them to seem representative and wear uniforms for propaganda purposes. In this context, it may be possible that the uniforms were not only used for practicality but also as a communicative asset. This case highlights the duality in Hamas's tactical communication: while civilian clothing is essential for day-to-day guerrilla activity, uniforms may be employed in high-visibility operations when the group seeks to reframe its image and narrative in global discourse. This suggests that Hamas's operational choices are shaped as much by strategic messaging as by battlefield necessity.

As stated earlier, it is important to point out that the conditions Hamas fighters encountered during the October 7th attacks were more reminiscent of the terrain in which Hezbollah typically operates in southern Lebanon. In this context, it would make sense for Hamas to adopt similar practices when operating in comparable terrain. In summary, when it comes to the October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks, it is likely that Hamas members put on uniforms knowing that they would be operating in more exposed, combat-heavy environments outside Gaza, where conventional guerrilla tactics (like blending in) would be less effective.

#### 4.1.4 Hezbollah and the Lebanese Armed Forces

One key reason Hezbollah wears uniforms, while Hamas does not, is the need for Hezbollah to distinguish itself from the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Unlike Hamas, which operates in Gaza as the dominant military force, Hezbollah exists within a state that already has an official army. This unique situation creates a necessity for Hezbollah to establish its own military identity while coexisting with, yet remaining separate from, the LAF.

Lebanon's national military, the LAF, is the country's official defense force. It is responsible for national security and is recognized internationally as the legitimate military institution of the Lebanese state. However, Hezbollah, as a powerful non-state actor, has built its own military infrastructure that rivals the LAF in capability. This duality presents a complex dynamic, as Hezbollah must assert its independence without appearing to challenge the Lebanese state directly.

Wearing distinct military uniforms allows Hezbollah to visually and symbolically differentiate itself from the LAF. By doing so, it reinforces the notion that it is not merely an extension of the Lebanese state but an autonomous force with its own objectives and command structure. This distinction is particularly important given Hezbollah's positioning as a 'resistance' force against Israel, a role that the LAF, constrained by political and international considerations, does not explicitly take on. Furthermore, there have been instances of coordination in the past between Hezbollah and the LAF. For example, one of the most significant instances of practical coordination between Hezbollah and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) occurred during the July–August 2017 military operations in the Aarsal and Ras Baalbek regions of eastern Lebanon. These areas had become strongholds for jihadist factions such as Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS. Although both entities officially denied any joint operation, their actions suggested a level of indirect coordination – Hezbollah and the LAF were targeting the same groups, in the same timeframe, from different fronts.

Hezbollah's distinct military identity also serves political purposes. Lebanon is a politically fragile state with multiple sectarian groups vying for power. If Hezbollah's forces were indistinguishable from the LAF, it could create internal tensions and provoke accusations that the Lebanese state is complicit in Hezbollah's military activities. By maintaining a separate and identifiable force, Hezbollah allows the Lebanese government to plausibly deny direct involvement in its military operations, particularly when facing pressure from international actors such as the United Nations and the United States.

In contrast, Hamas operates under a different set of conditions in Gaza. Without a competing state military, Hamas does not need to distinguish itself from an official army. It is important to note, however, that Hamas is not the only militant group in the Gaza Strip. Gaza also includes multiple other armed factions, such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Popular Resistance Committees, and smaller Salafi-jihadist groups. All of these other factions behave the same way as Hamas when it comes to uniforms. They also coordinate with Hamas frequently – during major escalations with Israel, such as the May 2021 conflict ("Operation Guardian of the Walls") and the October 2023 attacks, Hamas coordinated rocket fire, timing, and sometimes even joint operations with factions like the PIJ. One result of this decentralized structure is that Hamas does not need to enforce strict uniform policies or visual differentiation between its fighters and those of other

factions. In fact, the blurring of identities among militants contributes to the difficulty of Israeli targeting efforts and strengthens Hamas's overall urban warfare strategy.

## **4.2 Tactical Considerations**

Tactical considerations and strategies employed by Hamas primarily stem from the operational environment in which the group functions – Hamas's avoidance of uniforms is a deliberate adaptation to its tactical environment, blending operational necessity with strategic messaging. Uniforms in Hamas's context would undermine the anonymity essential to its survival and success in urban combat zones, where fighters must frequently move between combat roles and civilian life.

### **4.2.1 Tunnel Systems and Human Shields**

IDF assessments and intelligence reports suggest that Hamas's avoidance of uniforms is not merely tactical but also strategic. Adding another layer to this dynamic is Gaza's extensive tunnel system, often referred to as the "Gaza Metro." These underground networks link different parts of the territory, allowing Hamas fighters to move weapons, personnel, and supplies out of sight from aerial surveillance. The tunnels reduce the need for uniforms even further, as fighters operating in close-knit underground cells rely on internal coordination rather than visual identification. Civilian clothing allows them to seamlessly transition between the underground and surface levels without drawing attention.

It is important to note that Hezbollah also has an extensive tunnel system on the border between Israel and Lebanon. The problem is not the tunnel system itself; it is the fact that a tunnel system, when combined with a lack of uniforms, as in Hamas's case, makes it almost impossible to distinguish between fighters and civilians once combatants emerge into populated areas. For Hamas, the tunnels are not just a means of covert movement; they are an extension of its broader strategy of blending into the civilian environment. While the tunnel system mostly serves the same purpose as it does for Hamas, uniformed Hezbollah fighters can still operate effectively through these tunnels because their operational context does not require the same level of civilian blending that Hamas depends on in the densely packed urban setting of Gaza. Thus, while both groups utilize subterranean infrastructure, the necessity of civilian clothing is far more critical for Hamas than for Hezbollah.

Given that air strikes are one of the primary tactics employed by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in their engagements with Hamas, visual identification of targets becomes especially critical. Precision-guided munitions depend on distinguishing combatants from civilians to minimize collateral damage and comply with international law. This means that civilian clothing complicates enemy targeting decisions, increasing the likelihood of hesitation or mistakes that Hamas can exploit. Collateral damage and civilian casualties, especially when indistinguishable from militant deaths, can be used by Hamas to delegitimize IDF operations on the international stage.

#### 4.2.2 Examples of Stated Intent

In a televised speech aired on Al-Aqsa TV, Hamas MP Fathi Hammad articulated the group's deliberate use of human shields, stating the following:

“[The enemies of Allah] do not know that the Palestinian people has developed its [methods] of death and death-seeking. For the Palestinian people, death has become an industry, at which women excel, and so do all the people living on this land. The elderly excel at this, and so do the mujahideen and the children. This is why they have formed human shields of the women, the children, the elderly, and the mujahideen, in order to challenge the Zionist bombing machine.” (MEMRI 2008)

This admission reinforces the group's strategy of embedding militants among civilians to deter Israeli strikes or, alternatively, to provoke responses that generate international condemnation through civilian casualties (MEMRI 2008).

An interview with senior Hamas official Mousa Abu Marzouk underscored this strategy further. When asked why Hamas had not built bomb shelters for civilians despite constructing over 500 kilometers of tunnels, he replied that the tunnels were intended “to protect us,” referring explicitly to Hamas fighters, not the civilian population (Ecanow 2023). This statement highlights Hamas's tactical exploitation of its own people, using them as human shields to prevent IDF operations or to weaponize resulting civilian casualties (Ecanow 2023).

Supporting this approach, Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar once proclaimed that the group had decided “to turn that which is most dear to us, the bodies of our women and children, into a dam blocking the collapse in Arab reality” (Ecanow 2023). This logic is manifested in Hamas's rejection of IDF evacuation warnings, instructing civilians to remain in areas targeted for military operations – Hamas spokesman Eyad al-Bozom openly encouraged civilians to “stay put in your homes and

your places,” a directive that underscores the group’s reliance on human shields as a defense mechanism (Ecanow 2023).

International actors, including the Biden administration, have criticized this strategy. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby explained on CNN that Hamas’s tactics are “war crimes against the same people Hamas supposedly represents,” referencing its use of civilians as shields (Ecanow 2023). Furthermore, Hamas has also been found using United Nations facilities, such as UNRWA schools, to store weapons or construct tunnels (Ecanow 2023).

### **4.3 Amount of Support From Sponsors**

Another important variable in explaining the differing uses of uniforms between Hamas and Hezbollah is the role of external military influence and finances. Hezbollah has received extensive military support from Iran, including structured education, formalized combat training, and the supply of standardized military gear (Levitt 2005: 3). This robust external backing has encouraged Hezbollah to evolve into a more conventional military organization, with uniforms contributing to unit cohesion, discipline, and a more structured chain of command (Zisser 2025, Interview). Both Hamas and Hezbollah have also engaged in covert fundraising through terrorist-linked charities and front organizations. The al-Aqsa International Foundation, though primarily a Hamas front, has also been reported to raise funds for Hezbollah (Levitt 2005: 7). Its head in Yemen, Sheikh Moayad, was arrested and extradited to the U.S. for supporting both Hamas and al-Qaeda. Moayad reportedly bragged about fundraising for all three organizations (Levitt 2005: 7).

While Hamas also gets most of its finances and support from Iran, the argument is that they get a lot less than Hezbollah, which restricts them from evolving in the same way Hezbollah has. Despite its alliance with Iran, Hamas experienced a temporary funding cut in 2012 after it refused to back Assad during the Syrian Civil War. While Iran resumed its financial support to Hamas in 2017, the funding has not matched Hezbollah’s levels (AJC 2024). Between 2012 and 2020, the U.S. State Department estimated that Iran allocated over \$16 billion to support the Assad regime and its network of proxy groups. In a 2018 speech at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) in Washington, Sigal Mandelker, then U.S. Treasury undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, criticized the Iranian regime for its extensive use of shell companies, document forgery, and illicit networks to finance terrorism (Karam 2018). Mandelker stated that Iran provides more than \$700 million annually to Hezbollah, a sharp increase from the previously

estimated \$200 million before Hezbollah's deeper involvement in the Syrian civil war (Karam 2018). Hanin Ghaddar, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, emphasized that this figure is especially noteworthy because it is the first time a U.S. official has publicly cited such a precise amount, linking it directly to Hezbollah's regional operations rather than its domestic Lebanese agenda (Karam 2018). Ghaddar further noted that funding for Hezbollah's social services in Lebanon has diminished over the past six years, while funding for its broader regional activities has significantly grown (Karam 2018). Iranian financial support often fluctuates based on tactical success and broader political conditions. For example, as noted in *Weinstein v. Iran*, the period of 1995–1996 was marked by increased Iranian support for Hamas due to its successful terror attacks, including bus bombings (Levitt 2005: 3). Some of this support is delivered as cash, but much is in the form of weapons shipments, including via Iranian cargo flights to Damascus, with supplies then transported overland to Hezbollah's bases in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley (Levitt 2005: 3).

Additionally, Hezbollah raises funds through a variety of illicit and semi-legitimate channels. In 2003, a cargo plane crash in Africa resulted in the loss of \$2 million in donations from Lebanese expatriates intended for Hezbollah (Levitt at the United States Senate 2005: 4). Paraguayan authorities uncovered receipts indicating over \$3.5 million in remittances from a Hezbollah operative, Sobhi Mahmoud Fayad, who is believed to have funneled more than \$50 million to the organization since 1995 (Levitt at the United States Senate 2005: 4). Charities tied to Hezbollah are also involved; for example, a U.S.-based Hezbollah cell in Charlotte, North Carolina, used charitable fronts to transfer about \$2 million, much of which remained in cash and was never recovered (Levitt at the United States Senate 2005: 5). Criminal enterprises further bolster Hezbollah's finances, such as the case of Ali Khalil Mehri, who funded the group through profits from pirated software sales (Levitt at the United States Senate 2005: 5). The tri-border area of Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay is a major source of income for Hezbollah, with estimates indicating the group generates about \$10 million annually there, and possibly up to \$500 million collectively among various terrorist groups active in the region (Levitt at the United States Senate 2005: 5). Iran also funds Hezbollah through ostensibly private charities closely affiliated with the Iranian revolutionary elite, including those controlling the judiciary, intelligence, and security services (Levitt 2005: 3). Mohammed Raad, head of Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc, has

acknowledged receiving Iranian funds, though he claims these are only for social services like education and healthcare (Levitt 2005: 3).

At the same time the U.S. State Department estimates that Iran provides Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad with over \$100 million annually (AJC 2024). This vast resource gap helps explain the disparity in their military structure. Furthermore, between 2014 and 2020, United Nations agencies allocated nearly \$4.5 billion in aid to Gaza, with approximately \$600 million spent in 2020 alone (Associated Press 2021). Over 80% of this funding was funneled through the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which supports the needs of Palestinian refugees who constitute about three-quarters of Gaza's population (Associated Press 2021). In addition to U.N. efforts, Qatar has contributed a total of \$1.3 billion in aid to Gaza since 2012, focusing on sectors such as infrastructure, healthcare, and agriculture (Associated Press 2021). This includes a \$360 million pledge made in January 2021 and another \$500 million commitment for reconstruction following the May conflict that year (Associated Press 2021). Qatar's financial assistance also supports impoverished families and helps cover salaries for employees of the Hamas-run government (Associated Press 2021). Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority has indicated it will spend \$1.7 billion on Gaza in the current year, with a significant portion allocated to the salaries of civil servants who ceased working after Hamas took control in 2007 (Associated Press 2021). The United States has also contributed to relief efforts, spending at least \$5.5 million on direct cash assistance and healthcare in Gaza in the same year, and providing an additional \$90 million in support for UNRWA operations in Gaza and the West Bank (Associated Press 2021).

While both Hamas and Hezbollah receive substantial external support, most notably from Iran, Hamas benefits from an additional financial supporter that Hezbollah does not: Qatar. Over the past decade, Qatar has emerged as one of Hamas's most significant state-level sponsors, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Doha hosts several senior leaders of Hamas and has provided an estimated \$1.8 billion in aid to Hamas-governed Gaza since 2007 (Ehl 2021). Approximately one-third of this support has come in the form of fuel shipments, which Hamas authorities reportedly resell for cash to pay civil servants (Al-Mughrabi 2021). The vast majority of this funding is officially designated as humanitarian aid, not military support. This aid is often coordinated through the United Nations and monitored in part by Israeli and Egyptian authorities to ensure it

reaches civilians. However, despite these controls, there remains widespread skepticism about how effectively this separation between civilian and militant use is maintained. Once the funds or resources are inside Gaza, Hamas can do with them as it pleases.

Hamas, similarly, has exploited humanitarian crises in Gaza to attract funding through fraudulent and front charities (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2024). These organizations pose as aid agencies serving civilians but are in fact conduits for financing Hamas activities and securing public sympathy and support (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2024). As of early 2024, Hamas is believed to have obtained as much as \$10 million per month through such charitable networks (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2024). Keeping this in mind, it is difficult to determine exactly how much of the humanitarian aid directed to Gaza, especially that which may indirectly reach Hamas, actually benefits civilians versus how much is diverted to support Hamas's military wing. The complicated governance situation in Gaza makes oversight and accountability more difficult, even though international organizations and donors frequently state that their assistance is intended for humanitarian goals like food, healthcare, and education. The government of Gaza, Hamas, has a long history of abusing aid. For example, a number of reports and investigations have revealed that Hamas has embezzled money and supplies, including concrete intended for civilian infrastructure, in order to construct military tunnels or manufacture rockets.

In my interview with Professor Zisser, I made the case that intelligence assessments frequently cite: that Hamas's use of civilian clothing in combat is a calculated tactic to influence international perception rather than just a result of resource constraints. Professor Zisser, however, expressed caution in fully endorsing this interpretation. While he acknowledged that such tactics might be a factor, he emphasized that they are unlikely to be the sole or even primary reason for the absence of uniforms among Hamas fighters. He noted that Hezbollah has also exploited the ambiguity between civilian and militant identities, particularly in urban combat zones, though its military operations tend to be more organized and structured.

#### 4.3.1 Structural Disparity Stemming from the Resource Gap

When talking about the disparity in structures between Hamas and Hezbollah, it is important to note what is meant by structure. This thesis specifically points to two core dimensions: their organizational structure and the evolutionary phase each group currently occupies in its development. It is evident from examining the organizational structures of militant groups such as

Hamas and Hezbollah that the stage of development that these groups are in has a significant impact on their organizational structure. The political, military, and institutional characteristics of militant groups change over time in response to internal resources, external forces, and strategic objectives. As the groups evolve, their organizational structure also changes, which then influences how these groups behave and represent themselves.

Unlike traditional state militaries, insurgent groups often do not possess the manpower, resources, or organizational structures required to engage in massed troop movements or to conduct large-scale, sustained battles. These choices reflect not only material constraints but also the defensive nature of insurgent warfare: groups fighting on their own territory, with all the attendant advantages of local knowledge and popular support, are especially likely to adopt such methods. Insurgent groups, like any combatant, must make choices about what forces to employ and how to use them, what weapons to deploy against which targets, under what conditions. The structure of an organization thus informs not only the tactics employed but the very nature of its strategic orientation.

In an interview conducted for this thesis, Professor Eyal Zisser, Vice Rector of Tel Aviv University and a noted expert on Middle Eastern affairs, offered significant insights into the contrasting organizational developments of Hezbollah and Hamas. Professor Zisser emphasized that Hezbollah has undergone a transformation from a militant group into a quasi-military force. Founded in the early 1980s, Hezbollah was shaped by direct Iranian support from its inception. By the late 1990s, and especially after the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in 2000, Hezbollah had evolved into a more disciplined, well-funded, and uniformed entity (Zisser 2025, Interview). Hezbollah's military sophistication was further enhanced by its participation in the Syrian Civil War, during which it functioned as an organized, uniformed military actor (Zisser 2025, Interview). Nowadays, it maintains a clearly defined chain of command, distinct political and military wings, intelligence services, and a level of bureaucratic organization that mirrors that of a conventional state-backed military force. Its integration into the Lebanese political system and access to sustained external support (especially from Iran) have enabled it to institutionalize its operations.

In its early years, Hezbollah employed terrorism and guerrilla warfare, notably pioneering the modern use of suicide bombings (Linetsky 2011: 7). Between 1985 and 1992, Hezbollah utilized

suicide attacks and light weapons primarily against Israeli, French, American, and Lebanese military targets (Linetsky 2011: 7). However, after 1992, Hezbollah underwent a significant strategic transformation. It abandoned suicide bombings entirely and shifted toward a hybrid warfare model, as vividly demonstrated in the 2006 Lebanon War. During this conflict, Hezbollah sought to deny Israel clear military victories through the use of sophisticated ambushes, anti-tank guided missiles, and coordinated defensive operations. Hezbollah combined guerrilla warfare with traditional capabilities, such as the use of heavy weapons and fortified defensive positions, rather than depending only on hit-and-run tactics (Linetsky 2011: 7).

This change was made possible in large part by Hezbollah's transformation into a more organized, disciplined military organization. Hezbollah's use of military attire is a structural statement rather than a purely aesthetic one, as Truzman (2025, Interview) points out in our interview. Hezbollah wants to appear more like a respectable resistance army than a simple militia by putting on uniformed ranks. Its official appearance is meant to increase its legitimacy in Lebanon and abroad. Hezbollah has further professionalized its forces and strengthened its structured military identity as a result of its experience on the battlefield, including during the Syrian Civil War. In other words, the adoption of uniforms by Hezbollah reflects its broader strategic vision to be recognized as a legitimate military force rather than a guerrilla movement. Operating within the context of Lebanon, a sovereign state with a formal government and national army, has enabled Hezbollah to develop a hierarchical military system while maintaining substantial influence over state mechanisms.

In stark contrast, Hamas displays a far looser relationship with military structure and visual discipline. As Truzman (2025, Interview) points out, this operational choice mainly reflects Hamas's strategic reliance on blending into the civilian population. However, when Hamas wishes to project an image of military professionalism, such as during the October 7 attacks, its operatives do wear uniforms. This deliberate use of military attire demonstrates a practical rather than an ideological approach to appearance. Hamas changes its image according to the tactical and strategic advantages it is pursuing at the time, such as presenting itself as a cohesive military force for propaganda successes or assimilating into civilian populations for survival.

Furthermore, Hamas, which took complete control of Gaza in 2007, is subject to a number of external pressures. Professor Zisser emphasized that Gaza's geographical isolation, the Israeli-

Egyptian blockade, and Iran's relatively meager financial support are the main causes of Hamas's difficulties (Zisser 2025, Interview). In Gaza, Hamas is also tasked with state-like duties like civil administration, law enforcement, and public service maintenance. Its ability to create a traditional army with uniforms and unified battalions is constrained by these demands. As Professor Zisser explained, Hamas continues to operate as a revolutionary resistance movement rather than a structured army, and this affects its internal organization and battlefield behavior (Zisser 2024, Interview). The primary aim of a revolutionary resistance movement is survival, resistance, and popular mobilization, not formal state-building or institutional development. For this reason, Hamas continues to operate as a decentralized, guerrilla-style organization. Its focus is on asymmetric tactics, mobility, and deniability.

Whether Hamas could eventually transform into a formal military organization like Hezbollah was a key question covered in the interview. Professor Zisser was skeptical. The stark differences in financial support, operational environment, and political context in 2025 make such a transformation unlikely in the short term. While Hamas has shown signs of increasing military sophistication, the ongoing siege of Gaza and the absence of long-term strategic support hinder its capacity to evolve into a conventional force. Hezbollah's ability to consistently deliver on Iranian strategic objectives, including its roles in Lebanon, Syria, and regional deterrence against Israel, has cemented its position as Iran's premier proxy group. As noted by Levitt (2005: 3), Iran's support is often performance-based, with funding increases aligned with successful attacks and strategic outcomes. Hamas has received similar boosts in funding following periods of active confrontation with Israel, but this pattern has lacked the consistency and depth of Hezbollah's support pipeline.

In conclusion, the external military influence and funding provided by Iran have significantly shaped the military structures of both Hezbollah and Hamas, but in markedly different ways. Furthermore, a group's evolutionary phase determines the degree of formalization and complexity in its structure. Hezbollah has been able to develop into a recognized military organization with uniforms as a fundamental element thanks to its steady financial ties with Iran. Hamas continues to forgo uniforms because it is a revolutionary resistance movement with more stringent regulations and a more decentralized, guerrilla-based strategy.

#### **4.4 Legitimacy and Global Acknowledgment**

Legitimacy is a critical factor in how insurgent groups operate, especially when it comes to their adherence to international norms like those established by humanitarian law. For many non-state armed groups, adopting uniforms and other formal military structures can be a way to signal legitimacy and seek recognition as a quasi-state or official military force. This is particularly relevant for groups that aim to transition from insurgencies into political entities with international standing. Hezbollah's use of military uniforms can be understood, in part, as an effort to gain legitimacy by aligning itself with the conventions of formal armed forces, making it easier to claim recognition as a legitimate military actor rather than just a militant group.

Hamas, on the other hand, already enjoys a high level of recognition, both regionally and internationally, as the governing authority in Gaza. The legitimacy Hamas already possesses is evident in the large-scale protests, media coverage, and political debates in countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, where thousands of people regularly take to the streets to demonstrate against Israeli military actions and in solidarity with Palestinians. This level of acknowledgment reduces Hamas's incentive to conform to international humanitarian law, including the obligation to distinguish its fighters from civilians through the use of military uniforms. For groups that seek to gain international legitimacy, such as Hezbollah in its earlier years, wearing uniforms can be a way to present themselves as a structured military force rather than a guerrilla group. However, Hamas does not need to prove its existence or struggle for recognition in the same way.

Because of the global protests and the consistent political discourse surrounding its actions, Hamas can afford to ignore certain legal norms without jeopardizing its broader standing. This is consistent with its uniform-avoiding strategy, which gives the group combat flexibility while also making it more difficult for Israel to defend its military actions in the eyes of the international community. The deaths of Hamas fighters who are struck by Israeli forces while blending in with the civilian population may be presented as civilian casualties, which would exacerbate demonstrations and international censure of Israel. This cycle supports Hamas' strategic approach, which uses its already high level of recognition to keep operating outside of official military conventions without facing serious legitimacy-related repercussions. Hamas can operate more freely in combat and avoid its responsibilities under international humanitarian law (IHL) by

refusing to wear uniforms. Under IHL, groups that wear uniforms and formally distinguish themselves as combatants are expected to follow the laws of war, which include prohibitions against targeting civilians and obligations to treat prisoners of war humanely. By not wearing uniforms, Hamas can obscure the distinction between its fighters and civilians, which can make it more difficult for adversaries to engage them without the risk of harming non-combatants.

## **5. Discussion**

The most compelling explanation for the divergence in uniform use between Hezbollah and Hamas lies in the interaction between operational environment, strategic logic, and structural incentives. The evidence shows that Hamas's choice not to wear uniforms is an intentional and functional adaptation, not a byproduct of incapacity or oversight.

The tactical environment plays a decisive role. Hamas operates primarily in the urban, high-density terrain of Gaza, where concealment, deception, and irregular mobility offer clear tactical advantages. In such environments, distinguishing fighters from civilians would reduce the group's ability to move undetected, complicate ambushes, and increase its vulnerability to Israeli retaliation. Drawing on Arreguín-Toft's (2005) and Mack's (1975) theory of strategic interaction, we can interpret this behavior as a weak actor adopting an indirect strategy, avoiding fighting on the enemy's terms. Similarly, Mack's (1975) concept of asymmetry of will helps explain why Hamas prioritizes survival and local tactical effectiveness over adherence to norms that serve state actors.

Hezbollah, by contrast, operates in rural and semi-mountainous terrain in southern Lebanon, where civilians are more dispersed and military formations are easier to organize and discipline. In this setting, the advantages of camouflage among civilians are diminished, while the benefits of establishing a clearer organizational identity, hierarchy, and legitimacy through uniforms increase. Wearing uniforms is part of Hezbollah's larger strategy to establish itself as a quasi-state actor. The operational environment of Hezbollah also compels them to set themselves apart from the LAF, the real military state actor.

### **5.1 Addressing Problematic Alternative Explanations**

After being considered, a number of other theories were either rejected or determined to be insufficient on their own. The resource gap argument, which contends that Hamas's limited

financial capacity, especially in comparison to Hezbollah, limits its ability to manufacture or provide uniforms for its fighters, is one of those recurrent arguments. On closer examination, though, it becomes clear that this explanation is a little deceptive. Hezbollah receives consistent and large-scale support from Iran, which enables it to fund training, uniforms, and more hierarchical control. Hamas, by contrast, while also supported by Iran, operates under a severe blockade and with more irregular funding streams. Yet, as the evidence shows, Hamas has managed to fund complex military infrastructure like the “Gaza Metro” tunnel network. It would seem nonsensical to argue that Hamas cannot afford to manufacture uniform apparel for its fighters if the organization can commit resources to such a sophisticated and covert endeavor. Furthermore, the resource gap argument is refuted by visual evidence. Hamas fighters have been seen in numerous reports and videos donning disguises during operations, such as women's clothing and IDF uniforms. These disguises are the product of tactical choices meant to trick and surprise the enemy, not financial restraints. Rather, blending into the civilian population serves a more immediate tactical imperative, particularly in Gaza's constrained environment. As Truzman (2025, Interview) emphasized, Hamas’s behavior is shaped less by scarcity and more by deliberate operational choice. Furthermore, while Hezbollah gets more consistent backing than Hamas, the group still exercises the use of civilian clothing in some instances. This also makes it less likely that the absence of uniforms in certain combat situations is purely a matter of resource scarcity.

Furthermore, in the urban combat environment of Gaza, Hamas’s emphasis on concealment extends beyond merely avoiding uniforms. It also encompasses the deliberate disguise of weaponry. As Joe Truzman (2025, Interview) highlights, Hamas fighters frequently obscure their armaments, such as wrapping RPGs in blankets or carrying them in inconspicuous containers, to evade detection while moving through densely populated neighborhoods or tunnel networks. This further shows that the decision not to wear uniforms does not just stem from material restrictions.

It would be oversimplified, though, to completely ignore material constraints; things like the continuous blockade of Gaza, stringent border controls, and restricted access to reliable outside funding could have an effect on Hamas's larger organizational structure and, consequently, its behavior in combat. The tactical and strategic decisions made by Hamas, such as its inclination to blend in with the civilian population rather than adopt uniforms, are probably supported by these structural pressures, which include political isolation. In this way, the lack of resources and outside

limitations do not "prevent" Hamas from providing uniforms directly, but they might help create a strategic culture that values civilian camouflage, stealth, and ambiguity.

Another explanation that was discussed in the analysis section is the acknowledgment argument, which posits that the idea that Hamas receives such substantial international recognition, especially in the Global South and increasingly among segments of the West, that it no longer feels compelled to adhere to international humanitarian norms, such as distinguishing its fighters through the use of uniforms. The implication is that Hamas sees no strategic value in conforming to laws of war if recognition can be achieved without them. While this argument may appear plausible at first glance, it fails to hold up under chronological and evidentiary scrutiny. Most notably, Hamas has received a marked increase in attention, acknowledgment, and media coverage in Western discourse largely after the October 7, 2023 attacks. Much of this attention has been polarized and often negative, with only limited formal acknowledgment coming from sympathetic academic or activist communities. Yet Hamas's avoidance of uniforms in combat predates this surge in attention by many years. The practice is well-documented during previous rounds of conflict in Gaza, including in 2014, 2018, and other intermittent clashes, long before any substantive uptick in international "recognition" was observed. If Hamas's conduct had meaningfully changed after gaining more visibility, then perhaps this explanation might carry weight. However, the group's use of civilian clothing and avoidance of identifying insignia has remained relatively consistent over time, suggesting the behavior is not a recent development driven by increased international legitimacy.

Another major complication in assessing this argument is the issue of visibility bias. In the aftermath of the October 7 attacks, global scrutiny of the Israel-Gaza conflict skyrocketed. Social media platforms, open-source investigators, journalists, and militaries have made available far more footage and documentation of the conflict than in earlier years. This increase in visibility makes it difficult to assess whether Hamas militants are now more frequently fighting in civilian clothing or whether observers are simply seeing it more often. Without reliable, longitudinal data on fighter attire across conflicts, claims of behavioral change due to international acknowledgment remain speculative at best.

Finally, it's worth noting that the logic of the acknowledgment argument underestimates the importance of tactical and operational considerations. Even if Hamas had been increasingly

recognized on the world stage, that recognition has not translated into broad legal legitimacy or formal statehood. From a strategic standpoint, their primary concern remains survival and effectiveness within an urban battlefield, not adherence to norms they do not see as serving their short-term objectives. In sum, the acknowledgment argument lacks historical grounding and overstates the relationship between international visibility and compliance with humanitarian norms. Instead of being a recent political ploy motivated by newly acquired legitimacy, Hamas's decision to forgo uniforms seems to be a long-standing tactical decision.

One of the main conclusions of this study is that there isn't a single, comprehensive explanation for why groups like Hezbollah and Hamas use uniforms differently. Rather, the variation is the outcome of several independent variables interacting, each of which makes a significant contribution. Organizational behavior regarding uniforms is influenced by a number of factors, including the availability of resources, external structural pressures (such as blockades and sanctions), the operational environment (urban vs. rural combat zones), and strategic culture. No single variable fully accounts for the phenomenon on its own. For instance, while financial constraints and external restrictions may limit resources, these do not mechanically determine behavior without also considering strategic incentives to blend into civilian populations or to prioritize deception. Similarly, organizational structure and the degree of centralization play critical roles in shaping whether standardized military practices, such as wearing uniforms, are enforced. Therefore, it is the combination and interaction of these variables, rather than any one factor acting in isolation, that best explains the observed differences in uniform use.

## **5.2 Limitations of Study and Challenges**

One of the major challenges encountered during this research was the lack of access to primary source material directly from Hamas and Hezbollah. These groups' official websites are constantly taken offline or rendered inaccessible, significantly limiting access to their public statements and official communications. In addition, many combat footage channels circulated via Telegram channels, a major source of raw, first-hand content, were found to be regionally blocked or restricted, making it difficult to verify or analyze visual material.

One of the unexpected challenges I encountered during this research was the general reluctance among academics to engage with the topic. Despite the importance of understanding armed group behavior, particularly in relation to issues like uniform usage, operational environments, and

combatant-civilian distinction, there appears to be a significant gap in scholarly willingness to discuss these matters, especially when they pertain to groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

Over the course of this project, I reached out to approximately 30 academics whose work intersects with related themes, ranging from insurgency and military ethics to Middle Eastern politics and international humanitarian law. I also reached out to war journalists who specialize in Middle Eastern conflicts. Out of these, only four responded – two of those responses were formal rejections, leaving me with just two interviewees. This low response rate underscores a broader issue within academia: a hesitancy to engage directly with politically sensitive, controversial, or security-related topics, even when such engagement is crucial for deeper understanding and nuanced analysis.

Several factors may contribute to this reticence. First, academics often face intense time pressures and competing responsibilities, including teaching, administrative work, and their own research, which can make them reluctant to take on additional commitments such as interviews. Second, the nature of the topic itself likely played a significant role. The subject matter involves non-state armed groups that are designated as terrorist organizations by several governments, which can make researchers cautious about association or perceived bias. There may also be concerns about reputational risk, political sensitivities, or the possibility of being misunderstood or misrepresented in a polarized discourse. Third, some potential interviewees may have felt that, despite working on related subjects, they lacked the specific expertise needed to meaningfully contribute to a focused project on combatant uniform usage. It should also be acknowledged that a contributing factor may have been my own research strategy: while I targeted relevant academics carefully, it is likely that I should have contacted a far larger pool of potential interviewees from the outset, given the inherent difficulties of securing responses on such a niche and sensitive topic.

This lack of academic engagement not only limited the number of interviews I was able to conduct, but also highlighted the relative absence of detailed empirical work on certain operational choices made by these groups. The very actors and behaviors that most urgently require analysis are often the most difficult to study, not just due to access issues on the ground, but because of a broader climate of academic caution or disengagement.

One of the central challenges in writing this thesis has been maintaining academic neutrality in the face of a highly politicized and emotionally charged subject matter. From the outset, I have been

aware that discussing actors like Hamas, Hezbollah, and the IDF inevitably risks perceptions of bias. While the thesis includes insights from Israeli academic voices (e.g., through interviews), this was not done to favor one narrative over another. I reached out to numerous Palestinian and Lebanese scholars – unfortunately, no responses were received.

The primary objective of this thesis has been to analyze the differences between a specific behavior of these groups. As the author, I fully acknowledge the external pressures, asymmetries of power, and historical grievances that shape the actions and choices of movements like Hamas and Hezbollah. The intention is not to reduce these factors to simplistic narratives of right or wrong, but to study their adaptations to their surroundings.

## **6. Conclusion**

This thesis set out to answer the puzzle of why Hezbollah and Hamas differ significantly in their use of military uniforms despite both being Iran-backed insurgent groups engaged in asymmetrical warfare. Specifically, it examined how geographical, operational, and resource-related factors influence their tactical choices regarding uniforms.

To investigate this question, the study employed a Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) comparing two groups with shared characteristics but differing in uniform use. Data collection involved qualitative analysis of video footage and documented incidents such as the October 7th, 2023 attacks, alongside secondary literature and open-source materials.

The hypotheses posited in the introduction seem to be correct – one of the key findings of this study is the impact of the geographical and operational environments on the tactical decisions made by Hezbollah and Hamas. Hezbollah operates in the rugged terrain of southern Lebanon, a landscape characterized by steep hills, deep valleys, and small, sparsely populated villages. In such an environment, the use of uniforms offers clear operational advantages. It reduces the risk of friendly fire, facilitates coordination between dispersed fighters, and provides a clear means of identifying combatants in a terrain that offers limited visibility and concealment. In contrast, Hamas operates within the densely populated urban environment of Gaza, where the need to avoid detection and blend in with the civilian population is more advantageous. The ability to move undetected through civilian areas reduces Hamas's vulnerability to Israeli surveillance and airstrikes.

A second factor that was looked at contributing to the differing use of uniforms by Hezbollah and Hamas is the disparity in their resources. Hezbollah has received extensive military support from Iran, which has enabled the group to develop into a more sophisticated, formalized military force. In contrast, Hamas, while also supported by Iran, has not received the same level of consistent and extensive military aid. It is important to note that the cited resource gap argument, that Hamas lacks funds for uniforms, was challenged by evidence showing the group's ability to fund complex projects like the Gaza tunnel network and acquire disguises such as IDF uniforms and women's clothing. These actions reflect tactical choices, not just material constraints. However, it would be overly simplistic to entirely dismiss material constraints – factors such as the ongoing blockade of Gaza, heavy border restrictions, and limited access to consistent external funding may indeed impact Hamas's broader organizational structure and thus their strategic behavior. In this sense, the resource gap and external restrictions do not directly "prevent" Hamas from supplying uniforms, but they may contribute to shaping a strategic culture where stealth, ambiguity, and civilian camouflage are more prioritized.

The discussion of Hezbollah's use of uniforms also brings to the fore the issue of legitimacy. Hezbollah's use of uniforms as an armed group operating in a state with an official military force (the Lebanese Armed Forces) can be interpreted as a tactic to establish its legitimacy as a military actor. However, Hamas's decision to forgo uniforms may be seen as a means of preserving its standing as a resistance movement as opposed to a recognized military organization. Additionally, the group is already widely recognized, especially in some Western activist circles and in some regions of the Global South. However, this argument was also rejected because Hamas's policy of not wearing recognizable clothing predates recent international attention and is more in line with their long-term strategy. Additionally, increased visibility after October 2023 has likely amplified observations of this behavior rather than indicating a change.

This research contributes to the understanding of insurgent group behavior by highlighting how environmental and resource constraints directly shape the tactical choices of insurgent groups. Moreover, the research challenges prevailing assumptions that non-compliance with uniform norms is simply due to resource scarcity. The study contributes a more nuanced understanding of militant behavior by showing that these decisions are often deliberate and strategic. For future research, a deeper understanding of militant organizations requires attention not only to their

external behavior but also to their internal dynamics. In the case of Hamas, its military operations are not carried out by a monolithic force but involve various sub-units with specialized roles. It is also critical to recognize that Hamas has historically maintained somewhat of a hierarchical structure, but this structure has come under significant strain in the aftermath of Israel's large-scale counteroffensives following the October 7 attacks. Communication has probably been hampered and decentralization has been forced through constant targeted killings, airstrikes, and the destruction of command infrastructure. Exact details remain unclear, which indicates that more research is necessary to understand how Hamas is changing its internal structure in response to Israeli military action. Understanding these adaptations can illuminate changes in how units are managed, how authority is delegated, and how these factors might be influencing the potential (non)use of uniforms. To broaden this analysis, comparative studies with other insurgent groups, such as the Houthis in Yemen or Shiite militias in Iraq, can help identify other patterns in militant behavior.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

Group	Clothing type	Source of footage
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/18d1t68/idf_posts_edit_of_footage_from_a_killed_hamas/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/18d1t68/idf_posts_edit_of_footage_from_a_killed_hamas/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1fmaivc/the_idf_destroys_a_hamas_group_attempting_to/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1fmaivc/the_idf_destroys_a_hamas_group_attempting_to/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/18187on/idf_captures_hamas_exiting_a_tunnel/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/18187on/idf_captures_hamas_exiting_a_tunnel/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1929nqu/pov_of_israeli_police_special_forces_hamas_of_the/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1929nqu/pov_of_israeli_police_special_forces_hamas_of_the/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/196h700/israeli_tank_vs_hamas_rpg_operator/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/196h700/israeli_tank_vs_hamas_rpg_operator/</a>
Hamas	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1g6033e/the_last_moments_of_hamas_leader_sinwar_in_the/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1g6033e/the_last_moments_of_hamas_leader_sinwar_in_the/</a>
Hamas	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/17w5co9/hamas_militant_killed_by_idf_at_entrance_of_base/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/17w5co9/hamas_militant_killed_by_idf_at_entrance_of_base/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/195kshf/idf_takes_out_armed_hamas_members/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/195kshf/idf_takes_out_armed_hamas_members/</a>
Hamas	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/172wi6b/footage_released_by_the_alqassam_brigades_the/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/172wi6b/footage_released_by_the_alqassam_brigades_the/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1fq64za/the_elimination_of_2_hamas_members_nukhba_unit/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1fq64za/the_elimination_of_2_hamas_members_nukhba_unit/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/192aozo/edit_of_all_the_angles_of_israeli_sf_ambush_on/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/192aozo/edit_of_all_the_angles_of_israeli_sf_ambush_on/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1erad63/idf_eliminate_multiple_armed_hamas_members_with/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1erad63/idf_eliminate_multiple_armed_hamas_members_with/</a>
Hamas	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/173vm44/israel_police_unit_matilan_release_video_of_an/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/173vm44/israel_police_unit_matilan_release_video_of_an/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/18ecu9p/footage_released_by_the_idf_shows_troops_of_nahal/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/18ecu9p/footage_released_by_the_idf_shows_troops_of_nahal/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1aqvp67/a_k9_tracks_and_apprehends_a_hamas_member_that/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1aqvp67/a_k9_tracks_and_apprehends_a_hamas_member_that/</a>
Hamas	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1765wji/footage_of_hamas_fighters_engaging_with_the_idf/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1765wji/footage_of_hamas_fighters_engaging_with_the_idf/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing/dressed as woman	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/18uoiih/idf_kills_hamas_combatant_dressed_as_a_woman/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/18uoiih/idf_kills_hamas_combatant_dressed_as_a_woman/</a>

Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/17thoo0/israeli_police_battling_hamas_militants/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/17thoo0/israeli_police_battling_hamas_militants/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1h235u1/idf_airstrike_on_a_hamas_member/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1h235u1/idf_airstrike_on_a_hamas_member/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1asujyv/october_7th_erez_crossing_cctv_footage/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1asujyv/october_7th_erez_crossing_cctv_footage/</a>
Hamas	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1asujyv/october_7th_erez_crossing_cctv_footage/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1asujyv/october_7th_erez_crossing_cctv_footage/</a>
Hamas	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/iwve8x/footage_from_the_2014_nahal_oz_tunnel_attack_from/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/iwve8x/footage_from_the_2014_nahal_oz_tunnel_attack_from/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1efvd7q/footage_of_the_elimination_of_hamas_sniper_from/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1efvd7q/footage_of_the_elimination_of_hamas_sniper_from/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/17xcw14/israeli_forces_eliminate_hamas_militants_armed/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/17xcw14/israeli_forces_eliminate_hamas_militants_armed/</a>
Hamas	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/171yyuj/hamas_militants_infiltrated_southern_israeli/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/171yyuj/hamas_militants_infiltrated_southern_israeli/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/17rff07/west_bank_medic_takes_weapon_from_downed_militant/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/17rff07/west_bank_medic_takes_weapon_from_downed_militant/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1aj0nkn/gaza_idf_troops_in_combat/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1aj0nkn/gaza_idf_troops_in_combat/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1dk6oov/idf_eliminate_hamas_sniping_leader_in_gaza_june/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1dk6oov/idf_eliminate_hamas_sniping_leader_in_gaza_june/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1besy32/maoz_drone_and_lmg_fire_eliminate_hamas/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1besy32/maoz_drone_and_lmg_fire_eliminate_hamas/</a>
Hamas	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1b5jltr/israeli_drone_killing_two_hamas_members/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1b5jltr/israeli_drone_killing_two_hamas_members/</a>

Row Labels	Count of Source of footage
Civilian clothing	22
uniformed	8
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>30</b>

## Appendix 2

Group	Clothing type	Source of footage
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1d98bjh/hezbollah_targeting_idf_assets_with_almas_atgm/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1d98bjh/hezbollah_targeting_idf_assets_with_almas_atgm/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1fzzf6q/drone_footage_of_hezbollah_militants_getting/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1fzzf6q/drone_footage_of_hezbollah_militants_getting/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1e7cx6v/hezbollah_targeting_an_idf_merkava_tank_at_hadab/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1e7cx6v/hezbollah_targeting_an_idf_merkava_tank_at_hadab/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1h706x0/operation_truthful_promise_hezbollah_ambushed_an/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1h706x0/operation_truthful_promise_hezbollah_ambushed_an/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1hoewc7/hezbollah_repels_several_attacks_by_jaysh_alfatah/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1hoewc7/hezbollah_repels_several_attacks_by_jaysh_alfatah/</a>
Hezbollah	Partially uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1gfkkr4/drone_footage_released_by_the_idf_shows_two/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1gfkkr4/drone_footage_released_by_the_idf_shows_two/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1i8pr1c/fsa_hitting_a_group_of_hezbollah_and_assad/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1i8pr1c/fsa_hitting_a_group_of_hezbollah_and_assad/</a>
Hezbollah	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/q85tp6/hezbollahamal_fighter_firing_a_rpg_rocket_at_the/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/q85tp6/hezbollahamal_fighter_firing_a_rpg_rocket_at_the/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/kzvmnj/hezbollah_targeting_fsa_vehicles_during_the_nubl/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/kzvmnj/hezbollah_targeting_fsa_vehicles_during_the_nubl/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/pegn7b/hezbollah_and_syrian_arab_army_in_zabadiani/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/pegn7b/hezbollah_and_syrian_arab_army_in_zabadiani/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/ms9450/the_hezbollah_crossborder_raid_that_started_the/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/ms9450/the_hezbollah_crossborder_raid_that_started_the/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1c9ossm/hezbollah_and_lebanese_army_personnel_battle/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1c9ossm/hezbollah_and_lebanese_army_personnel_battle/</a>
Hezbollah	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1gfl73i/hezbollah_operative_get_eliminated_by_idf/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1gfl73i/hezbollah_operative_get_eliminated_by_idf/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/6izb3e/hezbollah_in_the_syrian_desert_east_of_aleppohoms/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/6izb3e/hezbollah_in_the_syrian_desert_east_of_aleppohoms/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/oo6tsw/ziplining_wounded_hezbollah_soldiers_away_from/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/oo6tsw/ziplining_wounded_hezbollah_soldiers_away_from/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1entq42/h%D0%B5zb0llah_raids_and_captures_aldabsha_military/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1entq42/h%D0%B5zb0llah_raids_and_captures_aldabsha_military/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1df9p2a/hezbollah_targeting_an_idf_vehicle_wit_h_atgm_jun/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1df9p2a/hezbollah_targeting_an_idf_vehicle_wit_h_atgm_jun/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/sxquiq/footage_of_hezbollah_soldiers_and_saa_fighting/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/sxquiq/footage_of_hezbollah_soldiers_and_saa_fighting/</a>

Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1g9eb3k/elimination_of_armed_radwan_force_in_lebanon/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1g9eb3k/elimination_of_armed_radwan_force_in_lebanon/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1c3t565/nour_alدين_alzenki_movement_target_a_gathering_of/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1c3t565/nour_alدين_alzenki_movement_target_a_gathering_of/</a>
Hezbollah	uniformed	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1dret7c/elimination_of_2_hezbollah_militants_today/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1dret7c/elimination_of_2_hezbollah_militants_today/</a>
Hezbollah	Civilian clothing	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1dret7c/elimination_of_2_hezbollah_militants_today/">https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/1dret7c/elimination_of_2_hezbollah_militants_today/</a>

Row Labels	Count of Hezbollah
Civilian clothing	3
Partially uniformed	1
uniformed	17
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>21</b>

### **Appendix 3**

Interview consent form:

## **CONSENT FORM**

“(Non)Combatants and Insurgency: A Comparative Study of Military Identity in Hezbollah and Hamas”

### **PRIMARY RESEARCHER**

Name – Mark Aaron Levin

Supervisor – Shpend Kursani, PhD

Department – Johan Skytte Institute of Political Science: University of Tartu

Address – Lossi tn 36 City: Tartu Country: Estonia

Phone - +372 59057998

Email – [levinaaron779@gmail.com](mailto:levinaaron779@gmail.com)

**PURPOSE OF STUDY:** This interview aims to examine the reasons behind Hezbollah’s consistent use of military uniforms and Hamas’s more frequent reliance on civilian clothing. The researcher seeks to analyze the strategic, operational, and ideological factors influencing these choices. By comparing these two groups, the study will contribute to a broader understanding of how non-state armed groups navigate the challenges of asymmetric warfare.

**PROCEDURES:** The interview will begin with a brief introduction of the researcher and an overview of the study’s objectives. Initial questions will focus on the interviewee’s background and expertise, followed by more in-depth questions regarding the use of uniforms, deception tactics, and related operational strategies. The interview will be conducted in a semi-structured format and is expected to last approximately 30-45 minutes.

**POSSIBLE RISKS AND BENEFITS:** This research involves minimal risk to participants. Measures will be taken to protect the confidentiality and privacy of research participants. Participants will have the option to remain anonymous if they choose. If so, interviewees remain anonymous, and their responses will not be linked to their identity. Participants are free to

withdraw from the project at any time and may skip a question if they feel uncomfortable answering. You are not expected to directly benefit from participating in this research study except for the insight you might gain through answering the interview questions. If you are interested in obtaining a summary of research findings, please let the researcher know.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** If anonymity is requested, all identifying information will be removed, and responses will be attributed using a coded identifier. Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. Assigning numbers to each interviewee will anonymise the data. The subjects' identifiers (name, address, email address, telephone number, etc.) will not be maintained in association with the research data and will only be known to the principal investigator. The only person who will have access to the audio file and the transcription of the interview is the principal investigator from the University of Tartu, and any other person or agency required by law. Audio recordings and transcripts will be destroyed after the completion of the analysis. The information from this study may be published and publicly presented, but your identity will be kept confidential.

**COMPENSATION:** There is no monetary compensation for participating in this study.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** If you have any questions about this study or experience any issues resulting from participation, please contact the researcher at [levinaaron779@gmail.com](mailto:levinaaron779@gmail.com).

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**CONSENT:** I have read and understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason or facing consequences. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 4**

Guiding interview questions:

1. Hezbollah usually wear uniforms while Hamas seemingly avoids them: why do you think this is the case?
2. How do uniforms contribute to the identity and legitimacy of non-state armed groups like Hezbollah?
3. How does the use of civilian clothing benefit Hamas and Hezbollah in asymmetric warfare?
4. How do Hamas and Hezbollah leverage their appearance, whether in uniform or civilian clothing, in propaganda and media narratives?
5. How does their choice of attire influence international public opinion and political discourse? Acknowledgment?
6. How do Hamas's urban warfare strategies, such as tunnel networks and human shields, intersect with its use of civilian dress?
7. Are there any key factors we haven't discussed that might help explain the difference in uniform policies between Hezbollah and Hamas?