

The power dynamics behind the hostage exchange in Israel

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Release of hostages, November 2023

Carilyn Pointer - On October 7th, Hamas invaded Israel and took over 200 women, men, and children hostage. Fighting has ensued since then killing thousands. Most recently, a [temporary truce](#) was called allowing for the exchange of hostages. The temporary cease-fire allowed the greatly needed humanitarian aid to enter the country. The truce and exchange of hostages saved lives and helps to explain the power dynamics between the two agents in the conflict.

The conflict between Israel and Hamas is an example of relational power. [Relational power](#) defines a country's power by how it can put its material power into action by developing connections with other countries. This means that while it is important to have [material power](#) in the forms of military and economy, it is equally important how those expressions of power are deployed. For example, at first glance, Israel may have more material power in the form of weapons, resources, and alliances than Hamas. However, when Hamas took hostages, they changed the power relation between them and Israel, using precious human lives to barter for the exchange of Palestinian prisoners. Unfortunately, the reality is that in this conflict there has and continues to be loss of human life of both sides. But by offering a temporary alternative to that suffering, Hamas created a way to level the power dynamics between them and Israel and gave them power to negotiate a truce in their favor. Considering that Hamas has much less material power and influence than the

state of Israel, it is apparent that when carefully employed, power relations can have a large impact on the outcome of conflicts.

As mentioned, the loss of human lives is at the center of this conflict. Civilians are being indiscriminately bombed, evacuated, and killed. Hostages are being starved, traumatized, and tortured. On both sides there is suffering and loss. While power between political entities may be unequal and lead to different political maneuvers, the simple truth remains that the shared human experience of loss and grief within a global conflict is present for both sides.

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