

**GEO-POLITICAL AND MILITARY
IMPLICATIONS OF THE
2023 HAMAS – ISRAEL CONFLICT**

Situation Report

**CENTRE for AEROSPACE & SECURITY
STUDIES, LAHORE**

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Executive Summary

This report delves into the various dimensions of the ongoing conflict between Hamas and Israel, considering that the evolving nature of the situation has strong ramifications for the region and beyond. It illustrates the risks of regional spillover, global ripple effects, depraved diplomatic manoeuvres, and a paradigm shift in military tactics. Moreover, it projects conceivable long-term ramifications for the Kashmir conflict if wrong lessons or motivations are drawn by the involved parties.

Perpetual Israeli oppression denying breathing space to Palestinians has been the prime provocation for Hamas to launch an unprecedented offensive, namely “Operation Al-Aqsa Flood”, against Israel on the 7th of October. Hamas's tactical innovation, sophisticated communication, and strategy duped Israeli security by all standards. However, Israel's disproportionate counter-operation has been marked by blatant violations of human rights and rules of war.

The alarming escalation of the conflict has incurred human catastrophe on both sides of the divide, with the death toll mounting, infrastructure being destroyed, and public health worsening. By October 31, at least 8,805 Palestinians had been killed in Gaza, including 3,457 children and 2,290 women. On the other hand, the death toll on the Israeli side was around 1,400. Moreover, an estimated 200 Israeli civilians were being held hostage by Hamas. The horrendous

death toll includes women and children, which reflects grave human rights violations during the conflict by both sides.

Considering these developments, this report highlights convoluted factors, both internal and external, to analyse all possible catalytic elements behind the current Hamas-Israel conflict. Internal factors include grave human rights atrocities by Israeli forces against the people of Gaza, the status of Jerusalem, the Palestinian refugee crisis, security fences, and economic insecurities. The external factors shaping the conflict include the morphing global political order, shifting alliances, and the US-led normalisation process between Israel and the Arab countries. The internal factors, coupled with external factors, made such an offensive attack a rational and cost-effective option for Hamas to ensure its security and political imperatives.

This report further highlights global responses which have been marked by geo-political frictions. The conflict tested the clouts of regional and global powers at a time when the prevalent international structure was losing its sway due to multiple seismic shifts. The United States has reaffirmed its support for Israel both militarily and diplomatically. Russia has expressed deep concerns about the impact on civilians and has supported the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. China has called for an immediate ceasefire and protection of civilians. Iran has strongly criticised Israel's actions and expressed support for Palestinian self-defence.

Saudi Arabia has urged an immediate halt to the violence and criticised the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) inaction while backtracking from Arabs' normalisation of relations with Israel. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has condemned Israel's actions and offered to mediate, while Qatar has blamed Israel for the escalation. India has shown solidarity with Israel while reiterating its support for the Palestinian right to self-determination. Pakistan's response to the conflict involved a call for an immediate ceasefire and deployment of a protection force, with an emphasis on a two-state solution for Palestine. Despite conflicting reactions, there is a growing consensus for a 'humanitarian pause' among the international community due to the staggering human toll. However, Israel has rebuffed and given a cold shoulder to such demands and is operating with the utmost immunity to unleash more atrocities on innocent people.

This report also examines strategic drifts in Hamas' operations as it has employed innovative and unconventional military tactics to accomplish an unprecedented offensive against the Israeli forces. The cost-effective use of small ammunitions and smart technology, in synchronisation, has altered the cost and-benefit equation of war largely in favour of smaller powers and non-state actors. Furthermore, this report highlights that in war exercises there can be no alternative to motivation and fearlessness. Both have been

fundamental drivers for Hamas to carry out a full-throttle offensive to break the myth of Israel's invincibility.

This report further discusses potential diplomatic, economic, and strategic challenges for Pakistan as it appears that the conflict can spark major regional confrontations. In addition, the report draws parallels between Kashmir and Palestine due to the similitude between freedom movements and tactics used by both oppressors. It also elucidates India and Israel's violations of UNSC resolutions and war crimes through the use of prohibited weapons. It also points out the replication of tactics by the oppressors and oppressed in Palestine and Kashmir. Furthermore, the possible outcomes of any party learning the wrong lesson have also been elucidated.

Lastly, the report has put forth recommendations for Pakistan. These include aligning with popular sentiments, providing humanitarian aid, seeking a two-state solution, emphasising the legitimacy of self-determination, and highlighting international law violations. This report recommends that Pakistan should play a leadership role in international forums; emphasise the common victimhood of Palestinians and Kashmiris; utilise the media for advocacy; collaborate with Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries; and address the inaction on the UNSC resolutions.

Introduction

Following the tumultuous events of October, the Israel-Hamas conflict has reached a harrowing crescendo, sending shockwaves across the globe. The conflict, deeply rooted in historical grievances and competing national aspirations, erupted into a devastating series of clashes after a surprise attack by Hamas on an unprecedented scale. The conflict has been marked by rocket attacks, infiltrations, and violence. Against a backdrop of global concern, leaders from various nations grappled with the urgent need for a ceasefire, humanitarian aid, and lasting peace.

This comprehensive analysis explores not only the escalating tensions and international reactions but also the intricate diplomatic manoeuvres, military dimensions, and parallels with other disputed territories. It highlights how the use of low-end Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), along with other unprecedented military equipment, has challenged Israel's once-unchallenged air superiority, while tactical weapons have been deployed for strategic impact, altering the traditional battlefield landscape. Rationality in military strategies also comes under scrutiny, reflecting the complexities of decision-making in times of conflict. Moreover, considering the geostrategic implications, this analysis explores the push and pull factors that shape the outlook of other involved parties considering the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Furthermore, drawing parallels with the longstanding Kashmir issue, this analysis examines the lessons learned, or often misinterpreted, by various stakeholders. From the perspectives of the Kashmiris, the Indian government, and the global community, the study assesses the impact of the Israel-Hamas conflict on their perceptions and actions. It also probes the potential cost of strategic overstretching if a similar scenario were to unfold in the context of India and Pakistan, shedding light on the importance of balanced foreign policy decisions.

An in-depth assessment is also provided, considering the complexities of the conflict and its far-reaching implications. Recommendations are formulated, addressing both immediate concerns and long-term strategies that promote dialogue, and pave the way for sustainable peace.

This analysis offers a holistic understanding of the multifaceted conflict, placing it within a broader global context while illuminating its impact on national security and regional stability. This study, therefore, provides valuable insights for policymakers and researchers, emphasising the imperative of thoughtful diplomacy and conflict resolution in these troubled regions.

Historical Context of the Israel-Palestine Conflict

British Mandate

Palestine was among former Ottoman territories placed under British administration by the League of Nations in 1922. All these territories eventually became fully independent states, except Palestine, where in addition to “the rendering of

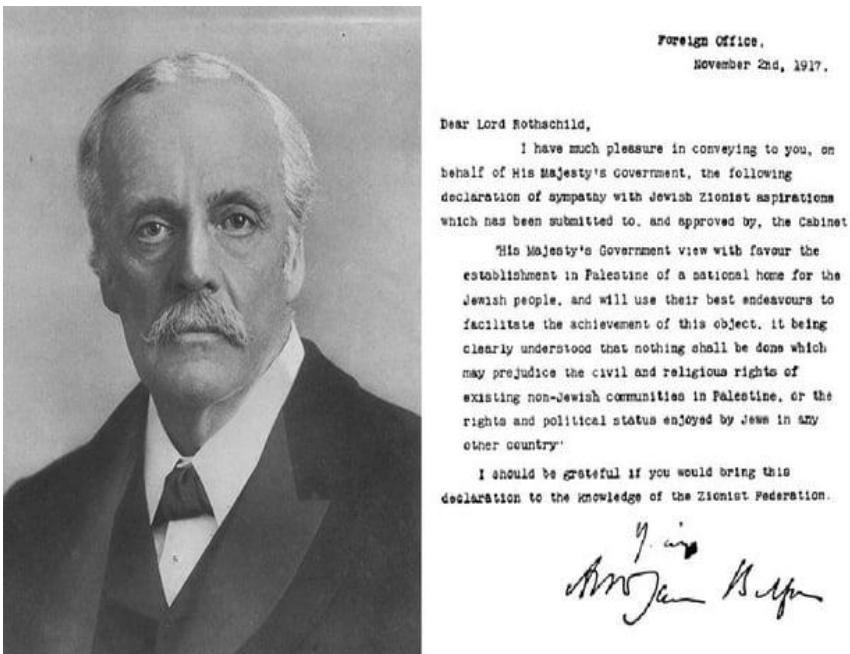


Figure 1: Arthur James Balfour and the Balfour Declaration

administrative assistance and advice”, the British Mandate incorporated the “Balfour Declaration” of 1917, expressing support for “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”. During the Mandate, the Zionist Organisation actively sought to establish a Jewish

homeland in Palestine. However, the native Palestinian population, whose ancestors had lived in the region for almost 2,000 years, perceived this as a violation of their inherent rights.

Arab demands for independence and resistance to immigration led to a rebellion in 1937 and toward the end of World War II, the Jewish community, who were much more organised, resorted to violence. In 1947, the United Kingdom turned the Palestine problem over to the United Nations – the successor of the League of Nations.

Partition Plan

UN proposed a partition plan allocating 55 percent of

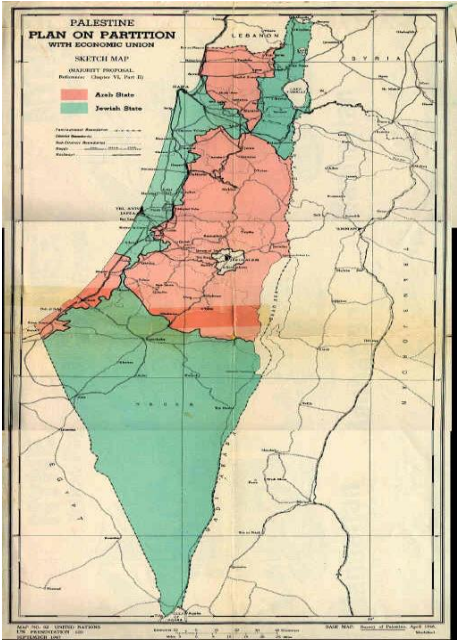


Figure 2: UN Partition Plan 1947

Palestine's land to the Jews, despite them constituting a third of the population. The rejection of this plan by Palestinians and their Arab allies set the stage for conflict. In 1948, as British forces withdrew, Israel declared independence, leading to war with neighbouring Arab countries. The conflict resulted in the

displacement of over 700,000 Palestinians and was termed the “*Nakba*” which means Catastrophe in English, and the establishment of the State of Israel.¹

Subsequent years saw tensions, wars, and attempts at peace. The 1967 Six-Day War led to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and East Jerusalem.² Efforts like the Oslo Accords³ in the 1990s were aimed at Palestinian self-governance but did not resolve the core issues. Peace talks stagnated, leading to uprisings (*Intifadas*) and violent clashes.

The 2000s and 2010s saw recurring conflicts, including the 2014 Gaza War and tensions over Jerusalem.



Figure 3: Oslo Accords

¹ Hussein Ibish, 'A "Catastrophe" That Defines Palestinian Identity', *The Atlantic* (blog), 14 May 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/05/the-meaning-of-nakba-israel-palestine-1948-gaza/560294/>.

² 'Six-Day War | Definition, Causes, History, Summary, Outcomes, & Facts, 'Britannica', accessed 25 October 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Six-Day-War>.

³ 'Milestones: 1993–2000, 'Office of the Historian, United States of America', accessed 25 October 2023, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/oslo>.

The Trump administration's policies, such as moving the United States embassy to Jerusalem⁴ and supporting Israeli annexation⁵, intensified the conflict. The Abraham Accords of 2020⁶ normalised relations between Israel and Arab states, bypassing the Palestinian issue.

In 2021, tensions over evictions in Sheikh Jarrah escalated into clashes, leading to a major conflict between Israel and Hamas.⁷ A ceasefire was brokered after 11 days, leaving hundreds dead and thousands injured.

The complexity of the ongoing conflict of October 2023 arises from historical grievances, disputed territories, and competing national aspirations, fuelling enduring tensions and cycles of violence.

Factors Affecting the Conflict

From the contested city of Jerusalem to the plight of refugees, the construction of security fences, and the persistent human rights violations, the internal factors driving the conflict are diverse. Moreover, external influences, shaped by the morphing global order, shifting alliances, and recent normalisation efforts, add another layer of complexity to the

⁴ 'Statement by President Trump on Jerusalem – The White House', accessed 25 October 2023, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-trump-jerusalem/>.

⁵ 'Trump Middle East Plan: Palestinians Reject "Conspiracy"', *BBC News*, 29 January 2020, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51292865>.

⁶ 'The Abraham Accords', *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed 25 October 2023, <https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords/>.

⁷ 'Life Under Occupation: The Misery at the Heart of the Israel-Gaza Conflict - The New York Times', accessed 25 October 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/22/world/middleeast/israel-gaza-conflict.html>.

situation. In this intricate landscape, understanding the conflict requires a nuanced analysis of these internal and external elements, each contributing to the persistence of this decades-long struggle for peace and territorial sovereignty. From the contested city of Jerusalem to the plight of refugees, the construction of security fences, and the persistent human



Figure 4: Palestine (1946-2010)

Internal Factors:

Currently, around 6.8 million Jewish Israelis and 6.8 million Palestinians inhabit the region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, which includes Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). The OPT comprises the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Within this area, Israel holds the central governing authority, with

limited Palestinian self-rule in some parts. In various aspects of life, Israeli authorities systematically favour Jewish Israelis while discriminating against Palestinians. It is evident from laws, policies, and statements by prominent Israeli figures that their primary objective has been to maintain Jewish-Israeli dominance in terms of demographics, political influence, and land control.

In pursuit of this goal, authorities have displaced, confined, forcibly separated, and subjected Palestinians to varying degrees of oppression based on their identity. In specific regions, the extent of these hardships is so severe that they could be categorised as the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution as outlined in the report by Human Rights Watch.⁸

- **Jerusalem:** Jerusalem holds immense religious and cultural significance for both Israelis and Palestinians. The dispute over the control of Jerusalem, particularly the Old City, has been a major point of contention between the two sides. The Al-Aqsa Mosque, located in the heart of Jerusalem's Old City, stands as a symbolic focal point in the Israel-Palestine conflict, with both sides laying historical and religious claims to its significance.
- **Refugees:** The Palestinian refugee crisis, stemming from the 1948 Arab-Israel war and subsequent conflicts, has

⁸ Omar Shakir, 'A Threshold Crossed', *Human Rights Watch*, 27 April 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>.

created longstanding grievances. Palestinians demand the right of return for displaced families, which remains a significant issue in peace negotiations.

- **Security Fences:** Israel's construction of security fences, particularly in the West Bank, has further deepened divisions. Israelis argue these are necessary for security against terrorism, while Palestinians view them as territorial encroachments. Amnesty International has termed this system of security fences and seclusion as an ongoing apartheid system instituted by the State of Israel.

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External Factors:

- **Morphing Global Order & Emerging Multi-polarity:** Shifting global power dynamics are impacting how international players engage in the conflict and mediate peace talks. Traditional power structures are being reshaped, leading to a re-evaluation of international relations. As major powers rebalance their roles on the world stage, their stance on regional conflicts, including the Israel-Palestine issue, is nuanced by strategic considerations and geopolitical interests. Hamas-Israel conflict is a gory saga, whereby the US-led prevalent World Order is converging to impose the will of Israel in

⁹ 'Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians', Amnesty International, 1 February 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2022/02/israels-system-of-apartheid/>.

the Middle East, rather over all Muslim countries. The international community stands polarised on Pro-Israel and Pro-Palestine factions. The ongoing conflict has effectively divided the world into two camps, leaving little room for choices.

- **Normalisation of Relations:** Recent normalisation agreements between Israel and some Arab states, including UAE and Qatar, facilitated by the US, have redrawn regional alliances. While these agreements signal a shift in Middle Eastern politics, they also generate controversy, especially among Palestinians who feel their cause is being seriously undermined.
- **Iranian Factor:** Iran's stance against Israel and its support for Palestinian groups like Hamas and Hezbollah influence the regional balance of power and impact Israeli security policies.

Events Leading Up to the October 2023 Stand-off

In the lead-up to the October 2023 conflict, tensions escalated between Israel and Hamas, bringing them to the brink of war. Before 7 October, Israeli forces had killed at least 247 Palestinians, while 32 Israelis and two foreign nationals were killed in Hamas attacks.¹⁰ Settler attacks displaced hundreds of Palestinians, and clashes occurred around the contested holy site, Al-Aqsa Mosque, in Jerusalem.



Figure 5: Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound

In September 2023, the situation became critical when Israel discovered explosives hidden in a shipment of jeans from Gaza, prompting a halt on all exports from the region.¹¹ In

¹⁰ 'Israel Retaliation Kills 230 Palestinians after Hamas Operation | Israel-Palestine Conflict News | Al Jazeera', accessed 25 October 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/sirens-warn-of-rockets-launched-towards-israel-from-gaza-news-reports>.

¹¹ 'Israel Halts Gaza Exports at Key Crossing after Explosives Found | Reuters', accessed 25 October 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-halts-gaza-exports-key-crossing-after-explosives-found-ministry-2023-09-04/>.

response, Hamas heightened its alert status, conducting military exercises, including practising storming Israeli settlements.¹² Palestinians were allowed to resume protests at the Israel-Gaza barrier. Amid these tensions, five Palestinians were killed at the border on 13 September. There were conflicting accounts of the incident.

International mediation attempts were made to de-escalate the situation. On 29 September, Qatar, the UN, and Egypt facilitated an agreement between Israel and Hamas officials in Gaza to reopen closed crossing points and reduce tensions.¹³ However, Egypt claimed to have warned Israel days before the attack about an impending explosive situation, which Israel denied. This attack occurred during the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah and a day after the 50th anniversary of the start of the Yom Kippur War, which also began with a surprise attack.

¹² 'Israel Halts Gaza Exports at Key Crossing after Explosives Found | Reuters'.

¹³ 'Qatar Mediates Opening of Gaza-Israel Crossing as Protests End', accessed 25 October 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/29/qatar-mediates-opening-of-gaza-israel-crossing-as-protests-end>.

Evolving Situation

[Note: *This situation is continuously developing. The information provided in this document is current as of 31 October 2023, and is subject to change.*]

Operation Al-Aqsa Flood

On the morning of 7 October 2023, Hamas launched a significant and historic military operation known as "The Al-Aqsa Flood". This operation surprised the world and stunned Israel due to its unprecedented scale, ferocity, and ingress. In terms of surprise, it can be compared to the Yom Kippur War of 1973, although this was a classic inter-state war and differed in many ways.



Figure 6: Operation Al-Aqsa Flood

Hamas fired thousands of rockets from Gaza into Israel.¹⁴ Simultaneously, Hamas operatives infiltrated Israel, resulting in clashes and hostage situations in several border towns. The situation

quickly escalated, leading to widespread panic and loss of life among civilians.

¹⁴ "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood" Proceeding According to Plan: Palestinian Group', 'Anadolu Ajansi', accessed 25 October 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/operation-al-aqsa-flood-proceeding-according-to-plan-palestinian-group/3010570>.

- **Application of Drones for Military Purposes:** Hamas carried out initial attacks on Israeli observation posts using drones. Israel's security fence that encircled Gaza had a network of sensors and surveillance cameras that either failed to fulfil their function or were overwhelmed.
- **Exposing "Iron Dome's" Vulnerabilities:** Concurrently, massive rocket attacks overwhelmed the Israeli air defence. An extensive air assault of rockets was launched into the coastal towns and as far north as Tel Aviv, approximately 70 kilometres north of Gaza. It is estimated that 3,000-5,000 rockets were launched during the first day alone, targeting enemy sites, airports, and military installations. These shaped operations for the next stage: the physical entry into Israel.
- **Deep Infiltration into Israeli Territory:** There were seven official border crossings in Gaza, of which only three were operational. Hamas reportedly breached the borders by sending in troops – some via Heli-gliders – and those troops then began dismantling the electric fences and walls using explosives. Bulldozers were reportedly used to create space for more fighters to enter Israel in several places. Hamas also had an extensive network of underground passages that may have been used to bypass Israeli checkpoints and physically mount surprise attacks.

Simultaneously, between 1,000-2,500 combatants infiltrated Israel from Gaza from around 20 locations using trucks, motorcycles, bulldozers, speedboats, and paragliders. Hamas caught the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) off guard, and its troops were able to move quickly through the border area, reaching up to 14 miles from the border. The combatants attacked the IDF and overran multiple military and police facilities.

Operation Iron Swords



Figure 7: Operation Iron Swords

The Israeli military responded quickly within hours, predictably, and in the easiest way, by aerial bombing inside Gaza. The immediate aim of the bombing was to demonstrate force and show the shocked Israelis that their army was not knocked out, that it was hitting back. Alongside the offensive

in Gaza, various units were mobilised to kill the combatants who had entered Israeli territory and retake possession of many military buildings that these combatants occupied. Many of these combatants were killed and the fate of many others remains unknown. On the same day, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared an emergency and recalled the reservist's force, around 300,000.¹⁵

Alongside aerial bombing, which is the safest way of response in the absence of adversary air power, a ground mechanised and infantry move towards Gaza started. Due to the level of improvisation and innovation displayed by Hamas and the precarious security situation of their forward bases, the Israeli ground march towards Gaza proceeded with much caution. It took them three days to reach Gaza and cordon off the area. Besides, carrying out a siege from all sides, food, water, and electricity have been denied to the Gazans.

Mass Evacuation Orders and Deadly Airstrikes

On 13 October, Israel's military issued evacuation orders for over 1 million civilians in Gaza City within 24 hours, signalling an anticipated ground invasion.¹⁶ A deadly airstrike hit a

¹⁵ Ruth Michaelson and Harriet Sherwood, 'Netanyahu Sets up Emergency Israeli Unity Government and War Cabinet', *The Guardian*, 11 October 2023, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/11/netanyahu-sets-up-emergency-israeli-unity-government-and-war-cabinet>.

¹⁶ Nidal Al-Mughrabi, Jonathan Saul, and Nidal Al-Mughrabi, 'Israeli Army to Confront Resilient Foe in Anticipated Gaza Invasion', *Reuters*, 13 October 2023, sec. Middle East, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-army-confront-resilient-foe-anticipated-gaza-invasion-2023-10-12/>.

convoy of fleeing civilians travelling on “safe routes” by the Israeli army, causing significant casualties, including children.

Escalation and Heightened Tensions

By mid-October, the Israel-Hamas conflict intensified significantly, with casualties rising on both sides. Israeli Prime Minister’s warning of a prolonged war¹⁷ underscored the gravity of the situation, emphasising the challenges in resolving it. Operations in the West Bank intensified on 11 October, resulting in the deaths of numerous Palestinians, and prompting widespread Israeli lockdowns, further restricting movement and exacerbating tensions.

Concurrently, Israeli settlers’ attacks in Palestinian villages escalated, deepening humanitarian concerns. Tensions peaked in East Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank on 13 October when Israeli forces restricted access to the revered Al-Aqsa Mosque, fuelling Palestinian frustrations and leading to increased clashes in the region.¹⁸

¹⁷ ‘Israeli Prime Minister Says Gaza War May Take “Longer Time”’, ‘Anadolu Ajansi’, accessed 25 October 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israeli-prime-minister-says-gaza-war-may-take-longer-time-/3031053>.

¹⁸ ‘Tensions Flare in East Jerusalem as Israeli Forces Restrict Al-Aqsa Access - The Media Line’, accessed 25 October 2023, <https://themedialine.org/top-stories/tensions-flare-in-east-jerusalem-as-israeli-forces-restrict-al-aqsa-access/>.

Al-Ahli Arab Hospital Tragedy

On 17 October, the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza was hit, resulting in hundreds of Palestinian casualties.¹⁹ The hospital, along with the entire area, had been issued evacuation orders by Israel four days before the explosion. At the time of the incident, many displaced Palestinians were seeking refuge in the hospital. Reports on fatalities vary significantly, with conflicting estimates from different sources. The Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry initially reported over 500 deaths, later revising the count to 471.²⁰ The mass killing at the hospital triggered widespread international condemnation, sparking protests at Israeli embassies worldwide.

Formation of Unity Government and Escalation of Conflict

On 18 October, Israel's leaders formed a unity government, uniting political factions to concentrate efforts on countering Hamas.²¹ Former Defence Minister Benny Gantz, a centrist opposition leader, stood alongside Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defense Minister Gallant, announcing their joint commitment to addressing the crisis.

¹⁹ Manisha Ganguly et al., 'Al-Ahli Arab Hospital: Piecing Together What Happened as Israel Insists Militant Rocket to Blame', *The Guardian*, 18 October 2023, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/18/al-ahli-arab-hospital-piecing-together-what-happened-as-israel-insists-militant-rocket-to-blame>.

²⁰ Ganguly et al.

²¹ 'What Is the Israeli Unity Government and What Does It Want to Achieve?', 'Al Jazeera', accessed 25 October 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/israel-unity-government>.

Escalation of the Conflict

On 19 October, Israel's military initiated a large-scale strike on Hamas targets in Gaza.²² Specifics of the operation have not been disclosed. The death toll in Gaza surged to 1,200, with around 5,600 individuals reported wounded, according to Palestinian media citing Gaza's Health Ministry.²³

As the conflict continued, casualties in Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank continued to rise significantly. The impact on civilians and infrastructure was devastating, creating urgent humanitarian concerns. Human rights organisations expressed deep concerns about the escalating violence and the urgent need for international intervention to address the crisis and protect civilians.

Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza

By 31 October, Gaza's healthcare system collapsed, with intensive-care beds completely occupied, surpassing the operational capacity of the hospitals.²⁴ The number of wounded individuals exceeded clinical capabilities, despite expansions and makeshift arrangements. The delayed response to relief appeals exacerbated conditions, leaving the

²² 'Gaza Humanitarian Catastrophe Looms, Blinken Condemns Hamas Depravity, 'SWI Swissinfo.Ch', accessed 25 October 2023, <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/reuters/gaza-humanitarian-catastrophe-looms--blinken-condemns-hamas-depravity/48883022>.

²³ 'Gaza Humanitarian Catastrophe Looms, Blinken Condemns Hamas Depravity - SWI Swissinfo.Ch'.

²⁴ 'Many Hospitals in Gaza on the Verge of Collapse: UN', 'EFE Noticias', 23 October 2023, <https://efe.com/en/sin-categoria/2023-10-23/many-hospitals-in-gaza-on-the-verge-of-collapse-un/>.

population vulnerable to bombings, hunger, lack of water, and the spread of diseases. Additionally, grave concerns have been raised over Israel's use of white phosphorus in military operations, posing serious risks and violating international humanitarian law prohibitions against putting civilians at unnecessary risk, further intensifying the crisis.²⁵

Destruction of Infrastructure

The human rights group, Euro-Med, reported extensive destruction in Gaza City and northern Gaza. Over a quarter of the area was affected, with 20 percent of houses no longer fit for habitation. Beit Hanoun, on the outskirts of the northern Gaza Strip, suffered the most, with approximately 60 percent of its buildings either destroyed or severely damaged.²⁶ By 24 October, over 12,000 tons of munitions had been dropped by the Israeli Air Force (IAF).

²⁵ 'Questions and Answers on Israel's Use of White Phosphorus in Gaza and Lebanon, 'Human Rights Watch', 12 October 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/12/questions-and-answers-israels-use-white-phosphorus-gaza-and-lebanon>.

²⁶ 'Israel Destroys a Quarter of Northern Gaza Strip, Palestinian Death Toll Exceeds 4,000 [EN/AR] - Occupied Palestinian Territory, 'ReliefWeb', 19 October 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/israel-destroys-quarter-northern-gaza-strip-palestinian-death-toll-exceeds-4000-enar>.

Staggering Human Toll



Figure 8: Wounded child in Gaza

By 31 October, at least 8,805 Palestinians had been killed in the conflict, including 3,457 children and 2,290 women. More than 21,000 Palestinians had been injured, reflecting the immense human cost of the conflict.²⁷ On the other hand, the death toll on the Israeli side was around 1,400 people, alongside an estimated 200 Israeli civilians being held hostage by Hamas.²⁸

²⁷ 'Israel Destroys a Quarter of Northern Gaza Strip, Palestinian Death Toll Exceeds 4,000 [EN/AR] - Occupied Palestinian Territory, 'ReliefWeb'.

²⁸ 'What Is Known About Israeli Hostages Taken by Hamas | AJC', accessed 2 November 2023, <https://www.ajc.org/news/what-is-known-about-israeli-hostages-taken-by-hamas>.

Role of Regional and Extra Regional Forces

Hezbollah and Other Combatant Groups



Figure 9: Hassan Nasrallah

Hamas called on all combatant groups to join and support its offensive. The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, largely perceived as a proxy group of Iran, has merely shown symbolic participation by firing sporadic rockets and missiles into Israel with no worthwhile impact. This could be with deep thought. Iran may have kept Hezbollah's participation as a bargaining chip to end Israel's ground offensive. Besides, the Hamas action has already crossed Israel's red lines, and therefore, any further pressure may have brought Israel / Iran to the brink of war. Hezbollah / Hamas joint military action would pose serious multidimensional challenges to Israel. Other than Hezbollah, Al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of

the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement (PIJ), has also claimed responsibility for ground infiltrations from southern Lebanon into northern Israel. But mostly, other than Hamas, no other group effectively participated in the conflict so far.

US Military Support to Israel

The US has sent two aircraft carriers to the Mediterranean, each with at least a dozen warships. This armada of warships also carries Patriot and THAAD batteries. This deployment is multipurpose; it displays American solidarity with Israel, deters Hezbollah from opening a northern front against Israel, and is a strategic message to powerful players like Iran, Russia and China to stay out of the issue militarily. While the US has bases in the Gulf, such as in Doha and Bahrain, she may find it difficult to use the assets from such bases to support Israel because of diplomatic implications and public opposition.



Figure 10: US carrier moving towards Israel

Israel carried out an attack on Damascus airport in Syria, which received a stern Russian warning. This was perhaps to stop any Iranian support in the region. It is pertinent to highlight here that the number of US troops in Iraq is approximately 2,500; in Syria, the number is around 900. Reportedly, there have been around eight attacks at four US locations in both these countries post-Hamas operation. The US suspects Iranian involvement in these attacks.

Global Reactions

United States



Figure 11: US President Joe Biden visits Israel to express solidarity

US President Joe Biden pledged unwavering support to Israel, its closest ally in the Middle East, following the attack on October 7. In response, Washington, which annually provides about \$3 billion in military aid to Israel, directed military ships and aircraft closer to Israel.²⁹ This included the USS Gerald R Ford Carrier Strike Group, the most advanced aircraft carrier in the US Naval arsenal, along with USS Normandy, a guided missile cruiser, and destroyers USS Thomas Hudner, USS Ramage, USS Carney, and USS Roosevelt.³⁰ Additionally, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin

²⁹ 'What Military Aid the US Is Sending to Israel after Hamas Attack?', Al Jazeera, accessed 24 October 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/what-military-aid-the-us-is-sending-to-israel-after-hamas-attack>.

³⁰ 'What Military Aid the US Is Sending to Israel after Hamas Attack?'

announced the provision of munitions to Israel, including interceptors for the Iron Dome defence system. US President Biden flew to Israel on 18 October, right as the Israeli forces were bombing Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza, as a testament to US political support towards Israel.³¹

Russia

Moscow issued a delayed statement acknowledging Israel's right to self-defence after the Hamas attack, which claimed the lives of at least 16 Russian citizens. However, President Vladimir Putin criticised Israel's air campaign in Gaza as unacceptable saying, "In my view it is unacceptable. More than 2 million people live there [in Gaza]. Far from all of them support Hamas by the way, far from all. But all of them have to suffer, including women and children."³² Russia supports an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital and has not classified Hamas as a terrorist group, differing from many Western nations. On 19 October, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned that the conflict in Gaza risks spilling into a regional crisis, adding that the efforts to pin blame on Iran were adding fuel to the fire.³³

³¹ 'Biden Offers Israelis Support, Palestinians Aid in Tel Aviv, 'Reuters', accessed 24 October 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/tel-aviv-biden-reassures-israel-addresses-palestinian-suffering-2023-10-18/>.

³² 'Russia's Lavrov Warns of Regional Spillover from Gaza Crisis', 'Al Jazeera', accessed 26 October 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/19/russias-lavrov-warns-israel-gaza-war-could-spark-regional-crisis>.

³³ "Russia's Lavrov warns Israel-Gaza war could spark regional crisis," Al Jazeera, 19 October 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/19/russias-lavrov-warns-israel-gaza-war-could-spark-regional-crisis>

China

Zhai Jun, China's Special Envoy on Middle East Issues, called for an "immediate ceasefire and protection of civilians".³⁴ China's Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Mao Ning voiced condemnation against all violence and attacks on civilians, including the killing of UN agency employees. She called on all parties involved to adhere to international humanitarian law, urging them to refrain from attacking civilians while making concerted efforts to de-escalate the situation.³⁵ Mao expressed China's deep concern over the ongoing escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and mourned the tragic loss of lives in the conflict.

In his first public comments on the Israel-Hamas conflict since it broke out, President Xi Jinping stated on 19 October that the "fundamental way out" of the conflict is a two-state solution to establish an independent Palestine.³⁶ He emphasised the urgent need for a ceasefire to prevent the conflict from escalating further and causing a severe humanitarian crisis. He made these remarks during a meeting with Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly in Beijing. President Xi expressed

³⁴ 'Israel-Gaza War: China's Middle East Envoy Tells Palestinian Official That Ceasefire Is "Top Priority," South China Morning Post', accessed 26 October 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3237634/israel-hamas-war-chinas-middle-east-envoy-tells-palestinian-official-ceasefire-top-priority>.

³⁵ 'China Urges All Parties to Israel-Palestine Conflict to Observe International Humanitarian Law', 'Anadolu Ajansi', accessed 26 October 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/china-urges-all-parties-to-israel-palestine-conflict-to-observe-international-humanitarian-law/3030251>.

³⁶ 'Xi Calls for Ceasefire in Israel-Gaza War, Says Two-State Solution Is Way Out', 'South China Morning Post', accessed 26 October 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3238538/xi-jinping-calls-ceasefire-israel-gaza-war-says-two-state-solution-fundamental-way-out>.

China's willingness to collaborate with Egypt and Arab nations to promote a comprehensive, just, and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue.

Iran

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has accused Israel of carrying out genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and warned Israel that it must pull back from its attacks on the besieged territory.³⁷

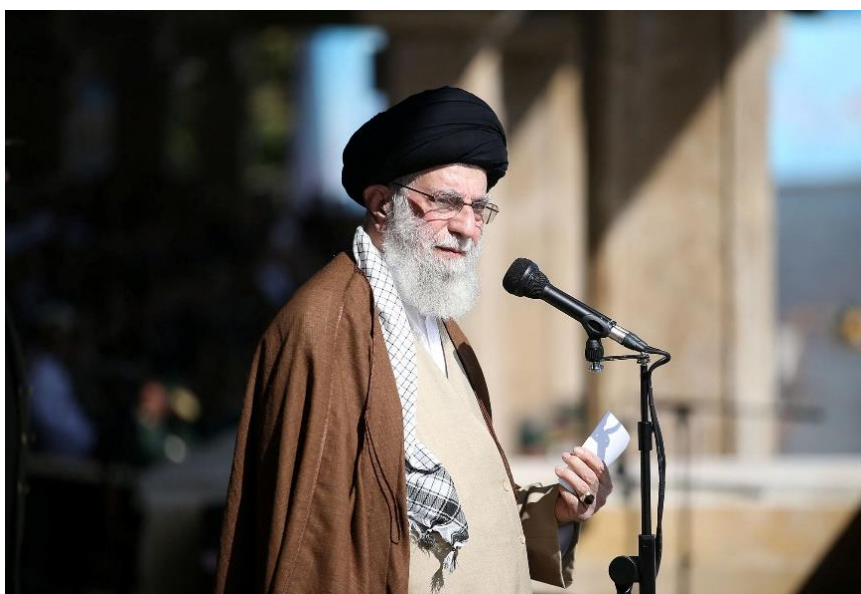


Figure 12: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

Iran has been a staunch supporter of Palestine's legitimate right to defend itself against Israeli atrocities. President

³⁷ 'Iran's Khamenei Says Israel Must Halt Assault on Palestinians in Gaza, 'Reuters', accessed 26 October 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/irans-khamenei-says-israeli-officials-should-face-trial-their-crimes-2023-10-17/>.

Ebrahim Raisi commended Palestine's "legitimate defiance" and emphasised the need to hold Israel and its supporters accountable.³⁸ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanaani highlighted Hamas' attack as a display of increased Palestinian confidence in Israel and refuted allegations of Iranian involvement in the attack.³⁹

Yahya Rahim Safavi, the former Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and an Adviser to the Supreme Leader, affirmed Iran's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause, pledging solidarity until the "liberation of Palestine and Jerusalem."⁴⁰

Saudi Arabia

On 7 October, the Saudi Foreign Ministry issued a statement on X (formerly Twitter), urging for an immediate halt to the escalation in Israel and Gaza.⁴¹ The Ministry expressed its close monitoring of the ongoing developments in the unprecedented situation involving various Palestinian factions

³⁸ 'Israel Battles Hamas Militants as Death Toll Nears 1,200', 'AP News', accessed 26 October 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-gaza-hamas-rockets-airstrikes-tel-aviv-ca7903976387cfc1e1011ce9ea805a71>.

³⁹ 'Iran Denies It Had Role In Hamas Attack On Israel', 'Barron's', accessed 26 October 2023, <https://www.barrons.com/news/iran-denies-it-had-role-in-hamas-attack-on-israel-1e70a38f>.

⁴⁰ 'Adviser to Iran's Khamenei Expresses Support for Palestinian Attacks: Report', Al Arabiya English, 7 October 2023, accessed 26 October 2023, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2023/10/07/Adviser-to-Iran-s-Khamenei-expresses-support-for-Palestinian-attacks-Report>.

⁴¹ Foreign Ministry [@KSAmofaEN], 'Statement, 'The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Is Closely Following the Developments of the Unprecedented Situation between a Number of Palestinian Factions and the Israeli Occupation Forces, Which Has Resulted in a High Level of Violence on Several Fronts There. Tweet, *Twitter*, 7 October 2023, <https://twitter.com/KSAmofaEN/status/1710629609757086172>.

and Israeli occupation forces, which has led to a significant increase in violence across multiple fronts. The statement reiterated the Ministry's repeated warnings to Israel regarding the potentially explosive situation resulting from continued occupation, deprivation of the Palestinian people's legitimate rights, and the recurrent systematic provocations against Palestinian sanctities.

Additionally, the normalisation talks between Saudi Arabia and Israel have been temporarily sidelined following the October 7 attacks and the subsequent siege of Gaza by the IDF.⁴²

In a significant diplomatic development, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman engaged in a telephonic conversation on 11 October, marking their first discussion since a China-brokered deal between Tehran and Riyadh to resume ties.⁴³ President Raisi and the Saudi crown prince emphasised the urgent need to halt war crimes against Palestine.

At the UN Security Council, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan strongly criticised the Council's prolonged silence on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, deeming it

⁴² 'Saudi Arabia Pauses Normalisation Talks with Israel amid Ongoing War with Hamas', 'France24', accessed 26 October 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20231014-saudi-arabia-pauses-normalisation-talks-with-israel-amid-ongoing-war-with-hamas>.

⁴³ 'Iran President, Saudi Crown Prince Speak for First Time since Ties Restored', 'Reuters', accessed 26 October 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/irans-president-saudi-crown-prince-speak-first-time-since-diplomatic-ties-2023-10-11/>.

unacceptable.⁴⁴ He emphasised Saudi Arabia's unequivocal condemnation of the targeting of civilians and urged an immediate halt to the escalating military operations in Gaza. He criticised the Security Council's inaction, holding it responsible for the crisis repercussions, loss of lives, property damage, and threats to regional stability. He further called for accountability for Israel's violations of international conventions, emphasising the necessity to address the crisis promptly to prevent further violence and extremism.

Türkiye

President Erdogan condemned Israel's blockade and bombing of the besieged Gaza Strip, calling it a "massacre". Speaking to the members of his ruling AK Party in parliament, Erdogan said that even war had a morality but this flare-up had very severely violated that. President Erdogan also said that his country was ready for mediation.⁴⁵

Qatar

The Qatari Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying that Israel was "solely responsible for the ongoing escalation due to its continuous violations of the rights of the Palestinian

⁴⁴ 'Security Council "Complacent" about Loss of Palestinian Lives, Says Saudi Foreign Minister', accessed 26 October 2023, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2397186/middle-east>.

⁴⁵ 'Turkey's Erdogan Calls on Israelis, Palestinians to Act with Restraint, 'The Jerusalem Post', accessed 26 October 2023, <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-762085>.

people, including the recent repeated incursions into the Al-Aqsa Mosque under the protection of the Israeli police."⁴⁶ On 9 October, Qatari mediators also held urgent calls with Hamas officials to try to negotiate freedom for Israeli women and children seized by the militant group and held in Gaza, in exchange for the release of 36 Palestinian women and children from Israel's prisons.⁴⁷

India

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi openly expressed solidarity with Israel, signalling a departure from India's longstanding stance on the Palestinian issue.⁴⁸ However, India's statement at the UN Security Council struck a more balanced tone, considering the sensitivities of the Islamic world. During the Security Council debate on the Middle East situation, India's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN R Ravindra reiterated India's support for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.⁴⁹ He emphasised India's efforts to send humanitarian aid, including 38 tons of food and

⁴⁶ 'Qatar Holds Israel Responsible for Escalation in Gaza', 'Middle East Monitor', 7 October 2023, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20231007-qatar-holds-israel-responsible-for-escalation-in-gaza/>.

⁴⁷ 'Qatar Leading Talks to Swap Hamas-Held Hostages for Palestinians in Israeli Jails', 'Reuters', accessed 26 October 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/qatar-leading-talks-swap-hamas-held-hostages-palestinians-israeli-jails-2023-10-09/>.

⁴⁸ 'Modi's Comments on Israel-Gaza War Signal Shift – Foreign Policy', accessed 26 October 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/10/12/israel-hamas-gaza-war-modi-response-shift/>.

⁴⁹ 'Will Continue Sending Humanitarian Aid to Palestinians': India at UNSC on Israel-Hamas War', 'Hindustan Times', 25 October 2023, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/will-continue-sending-humanitarian-aid-to-palestinians-india-at-unsco-on-israel-hamas-war-101698197337196.html>.

critical medical supplies, to affected Palestinians. Ravindra condemned the October 7 terror attacks and conveyed Prime Minister Modi's condolences to Israel over the loss of lives, expressing solidarity during their moment of crisis. He reiterated the need for direct peace negotiations and reaffirmed India's support for the Palestinian people through various developmental sectors such as health, education, women's empowerment, entrepreneurship, and information technology.⁵⁰

Pakistan's Reaction and Responses

Foreign Office

The Pakistani Foreign Office stated the start of the conflict, urging an immediate ceasefire and a return to peaceful negotiations, stating that they were "closely monitoring the unfolding situation". Pakistan reiterated its position that the only solution to the conflict was a two-state settlement – the establishment of a viable, sovereign and contiguous State of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital.⁵¹

Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani at the OIC

Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani led the Pakistani delegation at the urgent open-ended Ministerial Meeting of the Executive

⁵⁰ "Will Continue Sending Humanitarian Aid to Palestinians".

⁵¹ 'Pak Calls for Maximum Restraint in Israel-Palestine Conflict', The Express Tribune, 8 October 2023, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2439791/pakistan-calls-for-immediate-ceasefire-in-israel-palestine-conflict>.

Committee of the OIC held in Jeddah. Co-convened by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the meeting focused on the crisis in Gaza and the dire humanitarian situation faced by its besieged civilians.

In his statement, the Foreign Minister strongly condemned Israel's aggression and the cruel blockade imposed on Gaza, leading to death, destruction, and displacement.⁵² He specifically highlighted the Israeli attack on Al Ahli Hospital, labelling it a massacre of innocent civilians. He pointed out that Israeli forces were violating international humanitarian and human rights laws, committing war crimes and crimes against humanity through their indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force. The Foreign Minister called upon the international community to hold Israel accountable for these actions.

Foreign Minister Jilani stressed the immediate need for Israel to cease its terror campaign, calling for an immediate ceasefire, the lifting of the Gaza siege, and the halt of forced evacuations of Palestinians from their homes. Additionally, he emphasised the urgency of establishing humanitarian corridors to ensure the rapid, secure, and unrestricted delivery of humanitarian and relief supplies to Gaza.

⁵² Spokesperson Office, 'Foreign Minister's Participation in the Urgent Open-Ended Ministerial Meeting of Executive Committee of OIC', Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 October 2023, <https://mofa.gov.pk/foreign-ministers-participation-in-the-urgent-open-ended-ministerial-meeting-of-executive-committee-of-oic/>.

Ambassador Munir Akram's Statement at the UN⁵³



Figure 13: Ambassador Munir Akram

At the UN, on 25 October, Pakistan's Permanent Representative, Ambassador Munir Akram, addressed the ongoing conflict, stressing several crucial points as follows:

- He called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza, expressing concern that the continuation of Israeli operations could lead to severe civilian casualties and escalate the conflict significantly.
- He expressed disappointment over the failure of the ceasefire resolution, holding those escalating the conflict accountable. He said that the Pakistani nation reiterated its unwavering support for the Palestinian people, demonstrating solidarity during these challenging times.

⁵³ 'Amb Munir Akram Speaking on "the Situation in the Middle East, Including the Palestinian, Oct 24, 2023 - YouTube', accessed 26 October 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Re7M70xfZel&ab_channel=PakistanMissiontotheUnitedNationsNewYork.

- He strongly condemned Israel's airstrikes and military actions in Gaza, specifically pointing out attacks on schools, residential buildings, and hospitals. These actions were labelled as flagrant violations of international humanitarian law and were considered war crimes. Pakistan demanded accountability for these actions.
- He emphasised the unjust nature of equating Israel, the occupying power, with the Palestinians, who are victims of this occupation. The Council was urged to dismiss Israel's attempts to displace Gazans, underscoring the legitimacy of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination under international law.
- Ambassador Munir stressed that states under foreign occupation, including Palestine and Kashmir, possess a legitimate right to self-determination, a right that cannot be equated with terrorism. The invocation of the 'right to self-defence' by an occupying state was deemed invalid.
- He highlighted the necessity of the internationally agreed two-state solution for achieving lasting peace in the Holy Land. This solution envisions the creation of a secure, viable, contiguous, and sovereign Palestinian state based on the pre-June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.
- He underscored Pakistan's commitment to providing vital aid by mentioning the humanitarian assistance sent to the

affected region, emphasising its dedication to helping those in need during the crisis.

United Nations Resolutions

The UN became a battleground of diplomatic efforts as various resolutions were presented to address the situation. Initially, the UNSC was the focal point for addressing the escalating Hamas-Palestine conflict.

Russian-Led UNSC Resolution



Figure 14: United Nations Security Council

On 16 October, a Russian-led draft resolution was introduced in the UNSC. This resolution called for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, the release of captives taken since 7 October, access to aid, and the safe evacuation of civilians. While some countries, including China, Russia, and the UAE, supported the resolution, the US, UK, France, and Japan

voted against it, and several others abstained.⁵⁴ A major point of contention was the resolution's failure to explicitly condemn Hamas.

Brazil-Led UNSC Resolution

On 18 October, a draft resolution led by Brazil was presented to the UNSC. This resolution emphasised the need for humanitarian pauses to allow aid into Gaza, condemned violence against civilians, and demanded the rescission of Israel's evacuation order. While 12 countries supported the resolution, the US opposed it and the UK abstained, expressing the need for the text to recognise Israel's right to self-defence.⁵⁵

US-Led UNSC Resolution

Amid these developments, on 25 October, the US submitted its draft resolution to the UNSC. The US resolution called for a "humanitarian pause" to facilitate aid delivery into Gaza, supported the right of states to self-defence, and urged Hamas to release captives. While ten members voted in favour, Russia and China, two permanent members of the

⁵⁴ 'Security Council Fails to Adopt Resolution Calling for Humanitarian Pauses in Israel-Gaza Crisis on Account of Veto by United States', 'UN Press', accessed 24 October 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15450.doc.htm>.

⁵⁵ 'What we know about UN draft resolutions on the Israel-Hamas war so far', Al Jazeera, 25 October 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/25/what-to-know-about-un-draft-resolutions-on-the-israel-hamas-war-so-far#:~:text=Russian%2Dled%20draft%20resolution%20at,%2C%20Russia%2C%20and%20the%20UAE>.

UNSC, vetoed the resolution, questioning the resolution's effectiveness in ending the fighting. The UAE also voted against the resolution, indicating diverse perspectives within the international community.

UNGA Resolution



Figure 15: United Nations General Assembly

Following these unsuccessful attempts in the UNSC, on October 27, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) stepped in. Jordan presented a draft resolution to the UNGA, calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, unimpeded access to humanitarian aid, and the revocation of Israel's evacuation order in northern Gaza. The resolution, while not legally binding, received significant support, with 120 countries voting in favour. Notably, 45 countries abstained, and 14, including the US and Israel, opposed the resolution.

Complexity and Divergent Perspectives

This underscores the challenging nature of finding a resolution to the current conflict, with differing perspectives on humanitarian aid, self-defence rights, and the responsibilities of the parties involved. Diplomatic efforts continue amid these complexities, highlighting the struggle to address the crisis effectively.

The Military Prowess of Hamas

Origins and Development of Hamas' Military Prowess



Figure 16: Hamas fighters

Hamas was founded in 1987, during the First Intifada. It had a complex and ever-changing relationship with Israel, adapting its tactics to respond to the constantly shifting geopolitical landscape and the evolving defence strategies of Israel. Its initial operations were primarily low-level guerrilla tactics such as stone-throwing, Molotov cocktails or tossing bottles filled with flammable liquids and individual attacks with knives, etc., against Israeli soldiers and civilians. In the 1990s, especially after the Oslo Accords – which Hamas opposed – the organisation shifted its tactics to include suicide

bombings. These suicide bombings had predominantly targeted civilian areas in Israel. Hamas developed its military wing, enabling more organised training, weaponry acquisition and larger operations.

- **Advance Rocket Technology:** In the early 2000s, they equipped themselves with rocket technology, starting with crude Qassam rockets⁵⁶. Over the years, Hamas has improved this technology in terms of precision and range, enabling it to attack deeper into Israeli territory.
- **Web of Tunnels:** Hamas has created an extensive web of tunnels in response to blockades imposed by Israel and Egypt. These tunnels have various uses, such as smuggling goods and weapons into the Gaza Strip, enabling undetected internal movement, and facilitating cross-border raids into Israel. In the 2014 conflict (Operation Protective Edge), it used these tunnels to launch surprise attacks against Israeli military posts near the Gaza border⁵⁷.
- **Urban Warfare:** Urban warfare is a speciality of Hamas, particularly in the densely populated Gaza Strip. They have a strong advantage in close-quarter combat against Israeli troops.

⁵⁶ Relative Quiet, Restlessness, and Waiting, 'Weapon of Terror: Development and Impact of the Qassam Rocket', The Washington Institute, accessed 27 October 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/weapon-terror-development-and-impact-qassam-rocket>.

⁵⁷ David Ignatius, 'Opinion | Vast Gaza Tunnels Present a Battlefield of Nightmares', *Washington Post*, 18 October 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/10/17/gaza-tunnels-israel-hamas-war-fighting/>.

- **Information Warfare:** Hamas is also good at information warfare and uses social media to disseminate its perspective, influence opinions, and muster support⁵⁸.
- **External Support:** Hamas has also received external support, particularly from Iran, which has reportedly provided weapons, training, and financial resources to boost its military capabilities.

The Politico-Military Objectives of Hamas

The political and military objectives of a conflict are always inter-mingled and supportive. As per Clausewitz's philosophy, war is not merely a political act but also a real political instrument⁵⁹. So, the political objectives of the war, as derived from the operation are:

- To revitalise the Palestinian cause and attract support for a two-state solution.
- To expose Israel's atrocities in Gaza and its maltreatment of prisoners.
- To check Israel's ingress and acceptance in the Arab world.
- To assert ownership of Al-Aqsa Mosque.

⁵⁸ Mohammedwesam Amer, 'Hamas in Cyberspace: Social Media and Forms of Political Expression', Arab Media & Society, 14 August 2023, <https://www.arabmediasociety.com/hamas-in-cyberspace-social-media-and-forms-of-political-expression/>.

⁵⁹ 'Clausewitz: War as Politics by Other Means | Online Library of Liberty', accessed 27 October 2023, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/page/clausewitz-war-as-politics-by-other-means>.

- To infuse fear and security concerns in Israeli encroachers near Palestinian territories.

The military objectives, as derived from the strategy and tactics of Operation Al-Aqsa, are appended below:

- To discredit IDF and break their invincibility.
- To kill as many Israelis as possible and inflict a strategic shock.
- To target civilian houses in the Israeli settlement areas near Gaza.
- To take a sizeable number of military and civilian prisoners.

Hamas Perceived Preparatory Actions



Figure 17: Weapons of Hamas

Military operations involve intricate planning and preparation that demand attention to operational, technical, and administrative details. Since this was a large-scale operation

involving all three domains – water, land, and air – the planning and strategising process at the highest leadership level must have consumed months and may be more than a year. The main plan would have been thoroughly analysed,

and different variations deliberated against enemy hypothesised responses. The plan would have relied on available capabilities and weapons, and any other specific requirement would have been put up to its allies.

- **Use of Unorthodox Military Equipment:** The weapons used in the operation mainly consisted of rockets, drones, mortars, rifles, and communication equipment⁶⁰. However, the operation also involved using some new and innovative equipment. Dual passenger Heli-gliders were utilised to bypass ground obstacles and reach deeper targets⁶¹. Quadcopters equipped with munitions were also employed against armoured vehicles and static observatory posts. The use of such unorthodox equipment is unprecedented in such operations.
- **Collection of Essential Intelligence:** In any military operation, target selection and manpower allocation to each task are crucial elements of the plan. The targets selected must be directly linked to the military objectives and must have the approval of higher command and possibly the allies. At the same, the mission planning and target selection would have necessitated essential intel on the enemy defences and surveillance pattern. This information could have come from human intelligence

⁶⁰ Somdeep Sen, 'There Is Nothing Surprising about Hamas's Operation', accessed 27 October 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/8/there-is-nothing-surprising-about-hamass-operation>.

⁶¹ Samia Nakhoul, 'How Hamas Secretly Built a "mini-Army" to Fight Israel', *Reuters*, 16 October 2023, sec. Middle East, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-hamas-secretly-built-mini-army-fight-israel-2023-10-13/>.

(HUMINT), radio monitoring sets, and friends across the fence. Allies could have shared the more sophisticated electronic intelligence (ELINT).

- **Execution of the Plan:** After finalising the plan and settling logistics and weapons, the plan must be shared with the combat team. Due to secrecy, the entire plan may not have been shared except with the key players. However, the respective commanders must have thoroughly briefed the individual teams about the mission details, objectives, timings, etc. The multi-domain and multi-directional plan, with entry from nearly 20 places, required extreme coordination and synchronisation between and within teams. This would have required extreme training and wargaming at secured, invisible locations. The combatants may have been assembled in a remote location, cut off from the rest of the world. It is possible that foreign land was used for this purpose in addition to Palestinian land.
- **Timings of Hamas Attack:** Hamas' attack may have benefitted from Israel's turbulent phase of political instability. There have been protests against Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's proposed judicial reforms. The divisions within Israeli society had also affected military institutions' morale. As per one report, 161 IAF officers resigned to protest the government's proposed judicial

reforms⁶². Hamas also intelligently selected the day of the attack, the Jewish Simchat Torah public holiday, a day of worship and rest.

⁶² Emanuel Fabian, '161 Senior Air Force Reservists Bow out of Volunteer Duty to Protest Overhaul', The Times of Israel, 18 July 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/161-senior-air-force-reservists-bow-out-of-volunteer-duty-to-protest-overhaul/>.

Military Analyses and Takeaways

The military comparison of Hamas with Israel is like comparing a sword to a fork, a bullet to a rock, or an F-16 to a powered glider. Despite the vast difference in military power, this conflict has garnered significant media attention due to the surprising success of the unconventional military group against the organised nuclear-armed military. Several pertinent analyses of this ongoing conflict have been mentioned below:

- Irregular warfare, guerrilla warfare, asymmetric warfare, or unconventional warfare is a strategy that combatant groups like Hamas use against a conventionally powerful and organised state army like IDF.
- The lessons of this conflict have to be seen from the perspective of a conflict between a militant group and an organised state army. Many of the tactics of this conflict would be irrelevant in an inter-state war. For example, a paraglider flying over an active bomb line or using quadcopters with small munitions replacing artillery shells will not make sense for a conventional war scenario.
- Small militant forces can engage and tie down much larger regular army units, even with limited resources. An example is the Kashmiri freedom struggle, which has bogged down nearly 4-500,000 of the Indian Army.

- Hamas, which has raised arms to seek their homeland, are volunteers without the fear of death. Hence, motivation, courage and bravery are their greatest weapons.
- Unlike a conventional army, Hamas could conceal its preparations due to its relatively small numbers, small-sized weapons and strict communication discipline.
- Experts believe that the 'background noise' of political unrest and the deceptive messaging of Hamas may have distracted Israeli intelligence, leading to the failure to preempt the attack.
- Hamas used cheap but useful weapons that could be deployed in various ways, causing significant damage and casualties to conventional forces. The quadcopters and gliders are difficult to intercept by modern AD systems. Much of the challenge is due to their small size, which can evade radar detections. The source behind the acquisition of the gliders and the area where their training was carried out remains a mystery.
- Militant groups usually adopt guerrilla tactics, but the recent attack by Hamas was a mix of conventional and unconventional methods. They attacked in daylight, entered through multiple points using multiple means, and held their positions inside Israel for hours, making it a slightly different form of guerrilla fighting.
- Israel's defence against rockets primarily resides in its well-advertised Iron Dome system. There are mixed

reports on the effectiveness of this system. Even with optimal performance, the sheer volume of rockets launched could have saturated and overwhelmed it, resulting in many rockets succeeding in reaching their targets.

- Hamas has unguided solid-propellant rockets with a 250 km range that can reach Tel Aviv. These rockets create terror but rarely hit military targets. In 2021, Israeli intelligence estimated around 30,000 rockets available in Gaza, produced locally with Iranian support.
- Hamas reportedly used weaponised Low-End UAVs, including guided direct-attack and loitering munitions. The possession and effectiveness of weaponised UAVs is unverified. However, quadcopters successfully dropped small munitions over armoured vehicles and security posts, showing an asymmetric way of fighting.
- Hamas' careful planning indicates that it was unlikely to be caught unprepared by expected Israeli bombing. Most military hardware was probably moved and hidden well before the knee-jerk Israeli air attacks. It can otherwise survive Israeli hostilities by relying on local resources, leveraging local support, and employing cost-effective tactics.
- Hamas's existence is only threatened by internal divisions or actions that can alienate them from the population through excessive violence or unpopular ideologies.

- Psychological warfare was well conceived and executed. The combatants carried small cameras on their chests to send live videos and images of their success. These were beamed through every social media channel.

The targets attacked in Israel's Operation Iron Sword aim at seeking revenge and instilling fear in the Palestinian public.

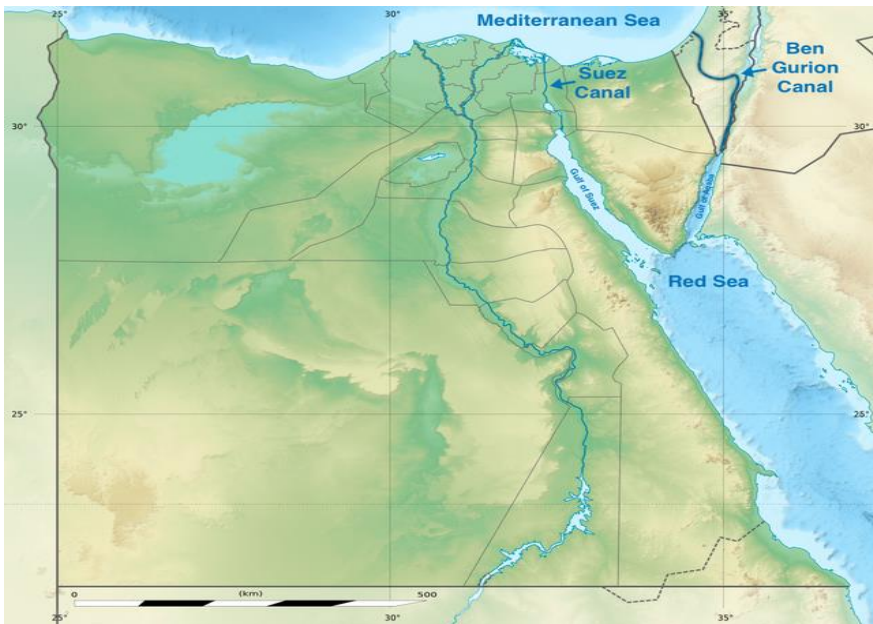


Figure 18: The proposed Ben Gurion Canal

However, the strategic trajectory of both parties in the conflict will have far-reaching impacts on the region and beyond.

The ongoing conflict between Hamas and Israel has also revived discussions in Israel on building the Ben Gurion Canal that would connect the Gulf of Aqaba to the Mediterranean Sea, an alternative to the Suez Canal. Although an ambitious, costly and difficult project, it reflects Israel's intentions to

become the fulcrum of global maritime commerce; to wrestle financial and geopolitical control from Egypt; and to have the military advantage of a defensive canal obstacle and provide a buffer against potential threats from the south. The canal project will further isolate the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Impact on Pakistan's National Security

Likely Direction of Conflict



Figure 19: Israel, Lebanon and Syria

The conflict is expanding at a prenominal speed, both in terms of military action and in the context of an imminent humanitarian catastrophe⁶³. Carrying out such an initial attack was certainly not in the logistical or strategic capacity of Hamas⁶⁴. As Israel does the backtracking of events leading to the final fireworks by Hamas and puts together the bits and pieces to determine who did it and how, and who are the behind-the-scenes planners, financiers, and abettors, the

⁶³ 'Gaza Doctors Warn of a Humanitarian Catastrophe after Israeli Attacks | Israel-Palestine Conflict News | Al Jazeera', accessed 25 October 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/14/supplies-exhausted-doctors-exhausted-in-gaza-catastrophe-looms-large>.

⁶⁴ guillermo, 'A Dangerous New Phase in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict - Foreign Policy Research Institute', accessed 25 October 2023, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/10/a-dangerous-new-phase-in-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/>.

conflict would start to expand from Gaza outwards, in phases. Lebanon is partly already in it, courtesy of Hezbollah. Israel is closest to its long-standing dream of having Iran bombed by the US, failing which it may do it⁶⁵; Syria and Iraq would continue to be bombed irrespective of whether they have done anything or not. At the outer ring, Russia and China may also be blamed. About the Middle Eastern non-state fighters, though Daesh is a weakened entity, even its small splinter groups' penetration in Israel would be sufficient to keep Israel off balance for quite some time. As far as state actors of the Middle East are concerned, none of them is likely to take up arms in support of the Palestinians, however, they would continue to make noise at various diplomatic forums.

Impact on Pakistan

Would the state and non-state actors of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), South Asia, and Central Asia take Israeli annexation of Gaza lying down or react? Also, if some of them decide to react, how would they proceed? All ifs and butts of this scenario would have an impact on Pakistan's national security. Pressures of different natures and severity would expose decision-makers to Hobson's choice. The likely challenges for Pakistan in several hypothetical scenarios could be:

⁶⁵ 'Why Bombing Iran Is (Still) a Bad Idea', Brookings, accessed 25 October 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-bombing-iran-is-still-a-bad-idea/>.

- Kashmir and Palestine are conjoint conflicts, the freedom fighters as well as oppressors of both these conflicts have been taking cues from each other in terms of strategy making and tactics. India has borrowed the concept of salami slicing of territories and altering of demographic composition from Israel. At the same time, the Kashmiri freedom fighters adopted their stone-pelting tactics from Palestinian fighters' Intifada. Given India's liking for false flag operations, it may like to capitalise on the narrow window when the international community is focused on the Middle East to launch an assault on Azad Jammu and Kashmir or Gilgit-Baltistan under the shadow of large-scale false flag operations, causing mass civilian and or military casualties. India has already deployed a sufficient number of troops in IIOJK and has the requisite logistics in place to conduct this kind of contingency operation without raising a prior alarm.
- The void left by delayed and or poor international and regional institutional-level response in Gaza may be filled by non-state fighters, who could start flocking to the combat region, including some who may pass through Pakistan. International pressure will build on Pakistan to stop the flow of these fighters from and or through its territory. So, Pakistan would come under the 'Do More' crossfire.

- If Pakistan departs from its traditional stance on the Palestine issue and makes a further tilt towards Hamas, then its ongoing vulnerabilities about economic and political instability as well as the critical dependence on the supply of European and US military weapons would be exploited by the outside powers. There would also be oblique pressures about some of the items like the GSP Plus, and arm twisting through stiff conditions for the upcoming programme review with the IMF.
- In case Iran is attacked by Israel or the US, Pakistan would have to handle an influx of refugees.
- The evolving global scenario necessitates self-reliance on the part of Pakistan as well as more caution and prudence.

Parallels between Kashmir and Palestine

Besides being the victims of the British Empire's legacy, similar ideas of self-determination, comparable liberation struggles and identical fates, the current appalling situation of Kashmir and Palestine gives ground for parallels to be drawn between both. Furthermore, the oppressors of both lands appear to be sharing similar traits. From their tactical designs and strategic schemes, India and Israel proved to be two peas in a pod. According to the Middle East Eye journalist Azad Essa, "For both Israel and India and Zionism and Hindutva, controlling Palestine and Kashmir are existential questions."⁶⁶

India and Israel: Two Peas in a Pod



Figure 20: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Since 2014, under the rule of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), India completely adopted the Israeli model to maintain its

domination, which resulted in the abuse of Kashmiris' fundamental rights, systematic oppression and institutional discrimination. The below-mentioned facts substantiate this argument.

⁶⁶ Essa, Azad. 2023. "Op-Ed Video: India and Israel Use Similar Tactics in Occupied Territories." Middle East Eye, October 11, 2023. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/op-ed-video-india-israel-similar-tactics-kashmir-occupiedpalestine>

- Both, India, and Israel are violating UN resolutions with impunity and have backtracked from the commitments made to the international body. India violated UNSCR 47 resolution by removing Kashmir's special status while Israel paid no heed to UNGA 3236.⁶⁷
- India is violating Article 3⁶⁸ of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War by committing torture, hostage-taking and rape⁶⁹ while Israel, along with similar violations, also violated Geneva Convention IV by bombing hospitals in Gaza.⁷⁰
- Article 49⁷¹ of the Geneva Convention IV states: The occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its population into the territory it occupies.⁷² The revocation of Article 370 and 35A by the Indian government indicates that it will follow in Israeli footsteps⁷³ since it is an exact

⁶⁷ "International Law Analysis of Major UN Resolutions Concerning the Question of Palestine - CEIRPP Study - Question of Palestine." 2019. Question of Palestine. March 12, 2019. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-196128/>.

⁶⁸ 'Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence', accessed 30 October 2023, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule93>.

⁶⁹ Fareed, Rifat. 2019. "Breaking the Silence": Report Documents Torture in Kashmir." News | Al Jazeera, May 20, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/5/20/breaking-the-silence-report-documents-torture-in-kashmir>.

⁷⁰ OHCHR. n.d. "Gaza: UN Experts Decry Bombing of Hospitals and Schools as Crimes against Humanity, Call for Prevention of Genocide." <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/gaza-un-experts-decry-bombing-hospitals-and-schools-crimes-against-humanity>.

⁷¹ 'Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949.', accessed 30 October 2023, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-49>.

⁷² Amnesty International. 2021a. "Chapter 3: Israeli Settlements and International Law." July 29, 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/01/chapter-3-israeli-settlements-and-international-law/>

⁷³ Jazeera, Al. 2019. "Kashmir Special Status Explained: What Are Articles 370 and 35A?" News | Al Jazeera, August 5, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/8/5/kashmir-special-status-explained-what-are-articles-370-and-35a>.

replication of Israeli policies that they implemented in Palestine for land confiscation, illegal settlements, and dispossession.

- Lastly, both occupation forces indiscriminately used prohibited weapons and exposed civilians to unnecessary risks. India used chemical weapons in IIOJK ⁷⁴and similarly, Israel used white phosphorus in Gaza⁷⁵. Both oppressors committed similar crimes against humanity.

Tactical Similarities between Israeli and Indian Occupation Forces



Figure 21: Indian forces in IIOJK

Apart from the shared objective of liquating the Palestinian

⁷⁴ Tribune. 2021. "Govt Shares Dossier on 'War Crimes' in IIOJK." The Express Tribune, September 16, 2021. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2319862/govt-shares-dossier-on-war-crimes-in-iiojk>.

⁷⁵ "Israel Using White Phosphorus in Gaza, Lebanon, Endangering Civilians: HRW." Israel-Palestine Conflict News | Al Jazeera, October 13, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/israel-using-white-phosphorus-in-gaza-lebanon-endangering-civilians-hrw>.

and Kashmiri resistance, the interconnection between India and Israel is evident from the replication of tactics. India resorted to ethnic cleansing, land seizures, population displacement, criminalisation of dissent, censorship of media, and controlling political movements – an approach quite familiar to Israeli apartheid and persecution of the Palestinian people. In their diplomatic discourse, both project freedom movements as organised terrorism against their states and used this narrative as a pretext to unleash more atrocities in occupied territories. However, the resistance and resilience shown by the freedom fighters of regions are unprecedented.

Kashmiri and Palestinian Freedom Fighters: One of a Kind



Figure 22: Protesters in IIOJK

The parallels can also be drawn between the freedom movements of Kashmir and Palestine as freedom fighters draw upon ideas and tactics from each other. Sumantra Bose, in her book *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Path to Peace*, argues that the first Palestinian Intifada glamorised the ideas of self-determination and mass mobilisation amongst the Kashmiris.⁷⁶

The inflow of ideas and tactics from Palestine to Kashmir is undeniable. From tactical and strategic conduct, it appears that Kashmiri and Palestinian freedom movements are two of a kind. Kashmiris adopted the stone-pelting tactic to express dissent just like Palestinians did during the First and Second Intifada. Similarly, the use of digital space to expose Indian atrocities is another adopted strategy. It is a general understanding that Palestinian developments inspired the Kashmiri offensive against Indian forces in the past decades. From Hamas' recent offensive against Israeli occupation, Kashmiri freedom fighters might learn the lesson that a united struggle for emancipation is essential.

Lessons for India, Kashmir, and Pakistan

Prediction is a tricky task for security analysts, especially when the situation is fluid. Scenario building is a rudimentary

⁷⁶ Bose, Sumantra. 2003. "Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace." *Foreign Affairs* 82 (6): 172. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20033809>.

practice for long-term thinking and strategic foresight. States often fail to meet future challenges because of their inability to predict them and potential shifts in an adversary's policies. However, such practices help in contingency planning.

India's Strategic Overstretching

Firstly, from the current Hamas and Israel conflict, the Indian government might draw the wrong lessons. Considering past experiences, there is a great probability that the Indian government might replicate Israel's endgame in Gaza. It may use sabre-rattling tactics to eliminate dissent in Kashmir. Moreover, using Israeli rationale, India might unleash collective punishment in the shape of genocide.

Tactical Shift in Kashmiri Freedom Fighters Modus Operandi

Secondly, Kashmiris might also draw inspiration from a major pivot in Hamas' strategy and might launch a new offensive against the Indians. Hamas accomplished two things in this ongoing conflict. First, they shattered the myth of Mossad and secondly, they raised questions regarding the invincibility of IDF. It was an outcome of the Palestinian fighters' tactical genius as they effectively used homemade rocket science and small drones for reconnaissance, suicide missions and anti-tank tools. Kashmir freedom fighters might use similar tactics

against Indian occupation forces to alter India's cost-benefit equation regarding the occupation of Kashmir.

Decisional Dilemmas for Pakistan

Lastly, the current Hamas-Israel clash offers lessons to Pakistan's security managers and policymakers as well. Considering transmuting global order and frail international norms, what will be Pakistan's response if India transits from "Precondition" to "No Solution" messaging regarding Kashmir? Such a stubborn stance is quite possible and will drag Pakistan to the crossroads by inducing a decisional dilemma.

Implications of Israel-Palestine Conflict: On the Anvil

The Israel-Palestine conflict has brought seismic shifts at the regional and global level, with all the gains made during the Arab-Israel normalisation process being reversed. Furthermore, an intense polarisation is seen among major powers: the US, Russia, and China. International bodies further lost their 'sway' as they remained ineffective in bridling Israel's dehumanising acts like bombing hospitals. However, the long-term implications of Arab Israel conflict on the South Asian region are on the anvil.

South Asia will not be subject to the short-term effects of this conflict. However, there are well-established links between Kashmir and Palestine. Lessons will be learned, and inspiration will be drawn. However, Kashmir is a nuclear flashpoint in South Asia. A wrong lesson learned from the present conflict will induce commitment traps in case any party strategically overstretches. It will undermine the strategic stability in South Asia. Apart from security concerns regarding South Asia, the ongoing conflict can induce multiple other challenges for Pakistan's national security.

Assessment of Hamas-Israel Conflict

Immediate Impact of 7 October Events

The surprise attack by Hamas on Israel on 7 October 2023, on an unprecedented magnitude, shocked Israel, shattering the perception of its military invincibility. Moreover, it was a colossal intelligence failure of Mossad. There was a total system failure on Israel's part. Hamas soldiers sneaked into Israel in a meticulously planned and highly organised operation that reflected a deep understanding of Israel's weaknesses.

Following Hamas' shock blitz, Tel Aviv went on the rampage, imposing a "complete siege" of Gaza, cutting off food, water, and power to the Strip. Simultaneously, it continued with indiscriminate air, ground and sea attacks using sophisticated weaponry, killing thousands of civilians, including women and children.

The massive death and destruction, especially of Palestinian men, women and children has created a global outrage. Urgent calls are made for a ceasefire and to create a humanitarian corridor for the supply of essentials to the besieged Palestinians in Gaza. Exploiting deep geopolitical divisions among the international community, Israel is operating with complete impunity. So far, the UNSC has failed to take any action and humanitarian efforts remain halted due to Israel's indifferent approach towards international norms and laws. Global leaders failed to take substantive measures

as they remained inclined towards geopolitical priorities.

Reasons for the Attack

There can be two major and immediate reasons why these attacks took place at this juncture of time. First, Hamas has been competing with the Palestinian Authority (PA) for the leadership of the Palestinian cause. The success of these attacks can strengthen its image. (The PA is the official government of the Palestinians that signed the Oslo Peace Accords with Israel. The promised Palestinian state has not materialised). The second reason is the effort by Hamas to disrupt the process of normalisation between Israel and the Gulf Arab states, especially with Saudi Arabia.

The Potential Expansion of Conflict

This conflict has the potential to grow into a wider, bloodier, and painfully unpredictable war. As the Israeli indiscriminate massacre in Gaza continues, it is unlikely that the conflict will stay confined. Hezbollah has already taken part in an exchange of fire on Israel's northern border. Hezbollah has reportedly 150,000 rockets to hit the key targets in Israel. If that happens, it may lead to an all-out war not just in Gaza but in Lebanon, too. Other countries could get dragged into that situation. The conflict can spiral out of control if opposing great powers get involved. The Gaza situation offers an ideal situation for US rivals to pull the US into a long and vicious

conflict in its own periphery. The US involvement will create new faultiness and their coupling with old conflicts will create a situation where the exit strategy for all parties, will become difficult to manage.

Likely Intent of Hamas

It is evident that Hamas wishes to be the representative of the Palestinian people in place of the Palestinian Authority. The historical rift between PA and Hamas and their divergent ideologies and modus operandi might be driving factors behind Hamas' latest offensive. Hamas considers a political solution equivalent to defeat while PA is inclined towards political spaces for a two-state solution and sees Arab's normalisation of relations with Israel as a step closer towards their objective.

Some Western analysts believe that Hamas anticipated a strong retaliation by Israel that may in turn trigger a broader Palestinian uprising, including in the West Bank and a revolt in Jerusalem, with Hezbollah joining their ranks as well. Hamas offensive has altered the security environment and strategic architecture of the Middle East. The probability regarding the expansion of the theatre of war increased as Hamas managed to revive emotional and sentimental affinity among Muslim countries for the cause of Palestinian liberation.

Such a situation is likely to revive the political process for a two-state solution and bring it to the global centre stage. The diplomatic channels will play a vital role as a prolonged war will exhaust all parties involved.

Palestine: Victim of Geopolitics

The situation in Gaza and the broader Palestinian question are directly impacted by geopolitical factors. It is clear that the Western world, particularly the US, sees Israel as a strategic outpost in the Middle East, allowing them to extend their reach and sway within the region. The strong political, military, and economic connections between the US and Israel underscore the huge importance that Washington attaches to its relationship with Tel Aviv. As mentioned earlier, US rivals will see it as an opportunity to entangle America into a convoluted conflict and generate more dilemmas for American policymakers.

The Approach of Status Quo-Oriented Arab States

Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt, along with countries that signed the Abraham Accords with Israel, especially the UAE, have an interest in defusing the situation. They desire an immediate cease-fire and effective implementation of a humanitarian corridor for Gaza. They would also like to see a

re-start of the political process on the agreed two-state formula.

Future of Netanyahu

In the aftermath of Israeli losses, it may be hard for Prime Minister Netanyahu to survive, politically. The domestic cost of the outcome is too high for Israel's rulers, therefore, the political fate of the key stakeholders must be taken into the equation. This report applies the same analogy to India's case, where elections are expected between April and May 2024.

Normalisation of Relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia

This conflict has given a serious blow to the process of normalisation between Israel and the Gulf Arab states, especially with Saudi Arabia. Prior to the events of 7 October, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman had hinted at possible rapprochement between the two sides – a significant event, considering the status of Saudi Arabia in the Muslim World, and the historical role of the Kingdom in the Israel-Palestine conflict. However, all the gains made during the normalisation process, by and large, are reversed due to dimetric viewpoints regarding the Gaza conflict.

Cost of Image in the Islamic World

The US support of Israel will cast a shadow on the public image of the US in the Islamic countries. There are a growing number of rallies against the Israeli atrocities in Gaza in the Muslim World as well as in several Western capitals. They have questioned the West's support for Israel, prompting discussions about the role of the international community. America will likely pay a huge cost in terms of losing support from friendly Muslim countries by offering economic and military aid to Israel.

A Blow to America's Exit Strategy from the Middle East

It will now be difficult for the US to extricate itself from the Middle East, a region that has dominated its national security agenda for the past five decades. President Joe Biden considers the challenges posed by a strong China and the recalcitrant power of Russia as more urgent. He believes that the entanglements of the US in the Middle East distract it from effectively dealing with the more pressing threats posed by China and Russia. The White House, therefore, formulated a creative exit strategy, around the Abraham Accords, by brokering a new balance of power in the Middle East that would allow the US to downsize its presence there. The normalisation of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel promised such an equilibrium.

A Fresh Push towards Two-State Solution

The current conflict has brought the Palestinian question back on the table. It is likely that there would be increased calls for the implementation of the two-state solution. Russia is already pressing this point of view in the Security Council. China is also emphasising that the UNSC should play its due role. The Arab League has also underlined the need for an expeditious two-state solution.

Ineffectiveness of the UNSC

In a span of two weeks, the Security Council failed to adopt any of the three draft resolutions submitted by Russia, Brazil and the US respectively, addressing the Hamas-Israel conflict. The current geopolitical tensions at the global level have revived the ineffectiveness of the Security Council.

Middle East – A New Ground of Global Tussle

The US and its allies have bogged Russia down in Ukraine. The US has poured massive amounts of military hardware and money into Ukraine to drain the Russian forces. Similarly, the US is creating alliances in the periphery of China in the South China Sea area to contain China. Russia and China may find the Gaza-Israel conflict as a counter opportunity to tie down the US and its ally Israel, with the help of local proxies.

Palestine and Kashmir

The longstanding disputes of Palestine and Kashmir, both involve the denial of the right of self-determination to their respective people to free themselves from foreign or alien occupation, in accordance with the relevant UNSC resolutions. Just as their Palestinian people have to suffer the military and economic dominance of Israel and the US-backed Western powers, the people of Kashmir face the overwhelming military and economic might of India.

Lessons of History

History makes it clear that no power can effectively subjugate another nation solely through military force if its people are determined to sacrifice their lives for the cause of freedom. Vietnam and Afghanistan are good examples. What is essential is the development of a well-thought-out and enduring grand strategy to thwart the expansionist ambitions of the coercive power. Israel's use of brute force is subject to the law of diminishing returns and an unexpected outcome of the conflict is likely.

Asymmetric Warfare

The devastating impact of a surprise attack by an unconventional military group against a well-organised nuclear-armed reputed military demonstrated the potency of

relatively simple and inexpensive weaponry if used with good planning and determination. Irregular warfare, guerrilla warfare, asymmetric warfare, or unconventional warfare is a strategy that combatant groups like Hamas use with considerable success against a conventionally powerful and organised state army like IDF. Small militant forces can engage and tie down much larger regular army units, even with limited resources.

Recommendations

- Pakistan's policy must reflect the popular sentiments of the people of Pakistan on this issue; their deep sympathy and support for the oppressed people of Palestine and their condemnation of the illegal indirect occupation of Palestinian lands by Israel. Notably, Pakistani leadership has taken a principled position on the issue.
- Pakistan must continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, especially those in Gaza. The first consignment of a planeload of relief goods was expeditiously dispatched by the Government of Pakistan.
- At the UN, Pakistan, together with like-minded countries, may continue to press for the deployment of a protection force in Gaza.
- Pakistan should continue to seek just and equitable solutions to the Palestinian issue as well as other long-standing and unresolved disputes based on international legality.
- A durable peace will emerge from the internationally agreed two-state solution and the creation of a secure, viable, contiguous, and sovereign state of Palestine based on the pre-June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.
- Pakistan should continue to emphasise that under international law, the struggle of people, subjugated to

foreign occupation, for self-determination and national liberation is legitimate and cannot be equated with terrorism.

- Pakistan may also continue to underscore that any attempt to create a false equivalence between Israel, the occupying power, and the Palestinians, the victims of this occupation, is untenable – legally, morally, and politically.
- Pakistan may continue to highlight gross violations of international law, including international humanitarian law by Israel and its supporters.
- As in the past, Pakistan should play a leadership role in the international forums, especially the UN and the OIC. This will enable Pakistan to recover some of its lost space, in particular in the Islamic world.
- Kashmir and Palestine issues, amongst the oldest and most important ones confronting the Muslim world, testify to historic injustices done by the colonial powers and perpetuated by West-dominated geopolitics. It is an opportune moment to work on the narrative of combining the victimhood of Palestinians and the Kashmiris. Pakistan may strongly denounce the illegal occupation forces like Israel and India who deny the occupied people their right to self-determination.
- Print, electronic, and social media tools may be used to highlight the plight of the Palestinian and Kashmiri people and to garner support for their cause.

- Extensive efforts should be made to mobilise human rights organisations to highlight the Israeli atrocities and inhuman treatment of innocent Palestinian men, women, and children. The brazen killing of Palestinian children is unprecedented.
- Pakistan may engage closely with friendly countries, especially the OIC countries to coordinate its position with them and strengthen its bilateral ties. It may advocate greater economic cooperation within the Muslim world.
- Pakistan may highlight the paralysis of the UNSC. It has been unable to issue a call for a ceasefire. In this regard, a heavy responsibility rests on those who contribute to the prolongation of this conflict.
- The Palestinian situation has clear implications for Pakistan's Kashmir policy. The lesson learnt is that in the contemporary world, national power in terms of economic and technological strength, political stability and military might play a decisive role in determining the outcome of major issues of war and peace.
- Pakistan should remain vigilant about any misadventure or false flag operation by India while the world is preoccupied with the Palestine-Israel conflict.

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