

## Israel- Gaza War: Need to Look Beyond Violence for a Solution

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### Introduction

07 Oct Israel's long-standing security doctrine crumbled in the face of the Hamas attack. Its intelligence and military institutions were unable to keep citizens safe. The attention of the West once again shifted to the Middle East and the Palestinian cause resulting in Russia-Ukraine Conflict no longer dominating the front pages.

This war is of a different scale and significance than many previous rounds of violent confrontation in the region and that will have reverberations throughout the Middle East. Ramifications of this attack and Israel's response can no longer be localised or confined to the region and will affect Europe, West Asia, Indo-Pacific and South Asia. There is an interplay of conflict which is taking place and the US is now confronted with engagements both in Ukraine and Gaza and has to manage the consequent chaos.

### The Gaza Strip

The Gaza Strip is one of the most densely populated areas on the planet. It's also one of the most heavily locked down, surveilled, and suppressed. Palestinians in occupied territories, including the West Bank and Gaza Strip, have faced surveillance and control for years, with many calling the conditions an apartheid.

In September 2021, Israeli forces completed a barrier around the Gaza Strip—that is essentially a 'smart wall' equipped with radars, cameras, underground sensors, and an array of other surveillance instruments. Yet the Hamas was able to plan and execute an attack which shocked the world.

### Hamas War Aims

Hamas was probably encouraged by the impression that Israel's internal political crisis—sparked by extensive protests against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's proposal to curtail the power of the Israeli Supreme Court—had diverted attention from Gaza and significantly undermined Israel's social cohesion and military preparedness.<sup>[i]</sup> This probably led a previously constrained Hamas to challenge the existing Israeli balance of power.

Hamas's fundamental aspiration was to inflict harm on Israel and undermine the state. But the Israeli intelligence and decision-makers had felt that Hamas's responsibilities in Gaza had tempered its extremism. Hamas encouraged this misperception, posing as a reliable actor and warning of escalation if Israel did not allow funding from Qatar to arrive in Gaza and did not permit more Gazan workers in Israel.<sup>[ii]</sup>

Israel had operated on the premise that a deterred and weakened Hamas was preferable to a governance vacuum in Gaza and would allow Israel to focus on what it perceived as more critical strategic challenges, such as Iran's nuclear aspirations and Hezbollah's military build-up. Accordingly, each time a flare-up occurred in Gaza; Israel's aim was to re-establish deterrence through a limited use of force. This allowed Hamas to carry out a long-term build-up of arms and military infrastructure and to improve its operational capabilities.<sup>[iii]</sup>

Over the years there have been differing viewpoints regarding the Hamas being a terror organisation or a governance organisation. al-Omari, who served as an Advisor to the

Palestinian negotiating team during the 1999-2001 Permanent-Status Talks has said; “What we saw on October 7 ... is that ultimately, [terror] seems to be part of their DNA. Using terror and violence for achieving political means won the debate within Hamas”.<sup>[iv]</sup>

In the past decade, the Israel Defence Forces has succeeded in mitigating two central threats from Gaza: rocket attacks (which Israel’s Iron Dome Defence System intercepts) and tunnels infiltrating Israeli territory (which were neutralised by an underground anti-tunnel barrier that Israel completed along the border with Gaza in 2021). But Israel failed to imagine an aboveground invasion and did not reinforce defences around Gaza in proportion to Hamas’s growing military capabilities.

The Hamas’ ultimate war aims are the destruction of Israel and the retention of power in Gaza. Hamas will exert a total effort—diplomatically, economically, politically, and militarily—in order to win, or, not lose. Hamas obviously views its existence as vital; however, the question being asked is whether this is the view held by the majority of the Gaza populace, who Hamas is using as human shields. Because Hamas views the Israeli war aims as unlimited, with its complete destruction as Israel’s goal, it will try to convince the people of Gaza that this translates to their destruction as well.<sup>[v]</sup>

### **Israel: The End of Status Quo**

From the moment Hamas broke through Israel’s security barrier with the Gaza Strip on 07 October and began its rampage, it was clear that Israel would never be the same. Israel cannot return to the status quo that existed. The state’s policy of blockading Gaza had failed to make them safe. The government’s calculation that it could lure Hamas into pragmatism, whether by allowing Qatari funding for Hamas or by giving work permits for Gaza labourers—had lured Israel into complacency. And the belief that most threats from Hamas could be neutralized by high-tech surveillance, deep underground barriers, and the Iron Dome Missile Defence System had proved wrong.<sup>[vi]</sup>

Its task now is to bring all the hostages back home and to make it impossible for Hamas and other adversaries, notably the Iranian-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, to threaten their security. In order to bring the hostages back Israel entered into a ceasefire which brought a halt in their momentum of attack and disrupted the tempo of operations but the ceasefire, though extended, has only, so far, seen 105 hostages released from Hamas captivity in Gaza which includes 81 Israelis, there are reports that 137 hostages still remain.

The era of intermittent cycles of fighting and cease-fires in Gaza is over. What will replace it is a continuous, protracted military campaign, driven by Israel’s paramount security interests and an unwavering commitment to the safe return of the hostages being held by Hamas. <sup>[vii]</sup>

The question that needs to be answered is can the world move beyond the revolving pattern that has become apparent over the past two decades: support for Israel to defend itself at the onset of a conflict; followed by mounting international and domestic pressure on leaders for a ceasefire and diplomatic solutions; and Israel’s withdrawal before the completion of its objectives.

### **Israel’s Perceived Strategy**

An effective Israeli strategy demands the integration of several interrelated, parallel endeavours—military, civilian, and political—executed methodically within a structured framework, which must be continually realigned with the expectations of the Israeli public and

combined with a diplomatic campaign that will secure the assistance and support that the country will need from allies and partners.

The broad Policy/Strategic Objectives of Operations in Gaza could be; a stable Gaza, with a broad-based government that renounces the use of terrorism to threaten Israel or the Israeli people. The outcomes in Gaza should convince or compel other countries in the region to cease support to terrorists. Finally, a restoration process to reach an Agreement with Saudi Arabia to normalize relations with Israel, and an expansion of the Abraham Accords.<sup>[viii]</sup>

If these are the broad strategic objectives, the military objectives of Operations in Gaza which flow are to destabilise, isolate, and destroy Hamas and provide support to a new, broad-based government in Gaza. This includes destroying Hamas's military capability and infrastructure. It must aim at protecting Israel from Gaza-based threats and attacks.<sup>[ix]</sup>

Finally, destroying Hamas and its supporting nations' terrorist networks, gathering intelligence on regional and global terrorism, capturing or kill terrorists and war criminals, and freeing hostages detained by the Hamas regime.

### **Palestinian Frustrations**

The initiation of violence by the Hamas was triggered by the deep frustrations the Palestinians felt towards their plight. Hamas designed its attack to bring the Palestinian issue to the fore and stoke an overreaction from Israel that would undermine international sympathy for Israel.

There is, of course, a school of thought that feels that the intensity of the Israeli reaction was necessary to prevent other non-state actors from joining in.

### **Conclusion**

The attacks no doubt have revealed the terrible failure of the idea that the Palestinian political question could be side-lined indefinitely without any cost to Israel. There had been no Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on a final status peace deal for years, even as Israel pursued normalisation with a growing number of Arab states.

Even as fighting rages, questions abound about what happens when it finally stops. As per the Economist; "The visible dilemma facing America Israel's staunchest ally is for how long it can support the war".

There are many questions that need to be answered including; 'What can be salvaged from the wreckage? Will Hamas survive, if not as an organisation, then as an ideology? Who will govern Gaza? What will be needed by both the Israeli's and Palestinians to broker any type of lasting peace'?

Unfortunately, violence cannot be a solution even for an intractable conflict.

### **Endnotes**

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<sup>[i]</sup> Congressional Research Service, Israel: Major Issues and U.S. Relations, September 27, 2023 <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44245>

[ii] Amos Yadlin and Udi Evental, Why Israel Slept, Foreign Affairs, January/February 2024 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/israel/why-israel-slept-yadlin-evental>

[iii] ibid

[iv] Middle East experts explore deep-rooted challenges in Israel-Hamas war, Stanford Report, November 30, 2023 <https://news.stanford.edu/report/2023/11/30/middle-east-experts-explore-deep-rooted-challenges-gaza-israel-conflict/>

[v] Kevin Benson, What Is The End State? Assessing Israel's Objectives For A Gaza Campaign, Modern War Institute 19 October 2023 <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/what-is-the-end-state-assessing-israels-objectives-for-a-gaza-campaign/>

[vi] Amos Yadlin and Udi Evental, Why Israel Slept, Foreign Affairs, January/February 2024 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/israel/why-israel-slept-yadlin-evental>

[vii] Ibid

[viii] Middle East experts explore deep-rooted challenges in Israel-Hamas war, Stanford Report, November 30, 2023 <https://news.stanford.edu/report/2023/11/30/middle-east-experts-explore-deep-rooted-challenges-gaza-israel-conflict/>

[ix] Ibid

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