

The Ongoing Hostilities Are to Nobody's Benefit

Introduction

The latest exchange between Israel and Iran, in the shadow war that is now in the open, came in the early hours of 25 Oct, when Israel hit Iranian military facilities in Tehran, as well as the provinces of Ilam and Khuzestan, which border Iraq. Operation Days of Repentance was its response to the Iranian ballistic missile attack at the beginning of the month.

Air strikes are normally undertaken to start a war but, in this case, Israel's Prime Minister (PM) Benjamin Netanyahu declared the attack was "precise and powerful". Further, Israel had completed its operations and warned Iran against retaliating.^[i] In 'On War', Carl von Clausewitz had stated, "Every age has its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions".

What comes next is the question on many minds, as there are fears that Iran will retaliate and the conflict, seemingly at a distance, will knock on the doors of many. Without doubt, such an escalation will have a huge impact on the world economy and pose more questions than answers.

Iran has downplayed the [provocation](#), saying it caused "limited damage", with reportedly four Iranian troops killed. It appears that Israel avoided hitting Iranian oil and nuclear facilities, as an attack on such installations would have had horrific consequences for the entire region.^[ii]

Israel's War Aims

PM Netanyahu had clearly articulated what Israel wants to achieve: recover the hostages, secure the borders with Gaza, and destroy Hamas. But recently, a fourth aim seems to have been added—the return of Israelis forced to evacuate their homes in the North by Hezbollah's bombing—and that is what has prompted the attacks on Hezbollah in Lebanon.^[iii]

But the larger question remains is whether Israel has achieved its war aims against Hamas. A number of hostages still remain in captivity and there is no clarity on their fate.

Next, is Hamas. The destruction of a terrorist organisation is difficult to measure. There is no doubt that there has been a decapitation of its leadership, but will it lead to the organisations' collapse. Factors such as popular support, ideology and organisational structure also play roles in deciding these groups' fates. Hamas has been battered in Gaza, but it is still a political force to be reckoned with as unaffiliated Palestinians have refused to join in a post-war reconstruction effort for fear of retaliation.^[iv]

Israel has also not been able to secure its borders. The underground infrastructure that allowed Hamas to engage in smuggling weapons and carrying out attacks seems to be still in place.^[v]

Overthrowing Hamas Will Not Make Israel Safer

What the world is witnessing in Gaza is unspeakable. Israel reacted to 07 Oct by targeting Palestinians instead of the Hamas, very unlike the global war on terror unleashed by the United States (US) in response to 9/11. Further, Israel has conveyed a sense of being a victim and doesn't hesitate to draw the line back to the holocaust. Whereas, in the present context with regard to the Palestinians, there is a large number of people who see its actions as disproportionate.

Israel has reasons to target Hamas, starting with the group's inability to make credible commitments to peace and its terror attacks. It may also seem [easier for Israel to overthrow Hamas](#) than to deter it in the future. But will the end of Hamas result in the restoration of deterrence and reestablish the safety of Israeli citizens.[\[vi\]](#)

Unfortunately, any post-Hamas governing entity will face a legitimacy problem, particularly if it has proximity to Israel. With the present alienation of the Palestinians, there is an unlikelihood of a pro-Israel governing body to gain legitimacy, as the conflict due to its relentless killings and destruction is feeding an enmity among Palestinians that Hamas exploited and will be exploited in the future too.

Further, the elimination of leaders is not an effective answer to a fundamentally political and strategic problem. There are a large number of people who have buried their parents, siblings, or children in Gaza and there are many homeless Gazans who lack livelihood and will be consumed by a desire for revenge.

The source of Hamas's strength is its narrative that it resists Israel's aggression and represents Palestinian interests. The narrative may not be entirely true, but it is gaining ground throughout the world and eroding popular and political support for Israel. According to a recent Gallup poll, more Americans have negative views than positive ones of the Netanyahu government and the Israeli campaign in Gaza.[\[vii\]](#)

The question that needs to be answered is that what will happen to the strong base of Israel's supporters in the US and the United Kingdom (UK) once Arab immigrants become an influential voting group.

Lebanon: Expanding Torrents

Israel's military aims toward Hezbollah in the current conflict are narrower than its aims toward Hamas, but they may prove to be just as costly. Israel is diverting resources from Gaza to fight Hezbollah. The 98th Division, which had been fighting in Khan Younis, has been redirected to the Lebanese border.

Israel feels that it can force Hezbollah to back down by [increasing the costs of conflict](#) through airstrikes, eliminating senior leaders such as Hassan Nasrallah and his successor, and taking out the group's [infrastructure](#). [\[viii\]](#)

This thought was re-enforced when Naim Qassem, the former Deputy Secretary General of Hezbollah and now its leader, showed willingness to go along with Lebanese Speaker of Parliament and leader of the Shia Amal party Nabih Berri's efforts to reach a ceasefire. This suggested that the group was walking away from its earlier commitment to only negotiate once a ceasefire had been reached between Israel and Hamas. However, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Aragchi emphasised to reporters that Iran, Hezbollah's main backer, would support a deal "...on the condition that it would be...synchronised with a ceasefire in Gaza". [\[ix\]](#)

Another fallout is that Israel's military offensive is driving Shias into predominately Sunni and Christian areas, which in turn is opening up old grievances and raising fears of inter communal violence. [\[x\]](#)

But is overconfidence and false optimism, in this context, an over-assessment of one's military capabilities and effectiveness, leading to an expansion in Israel's war aims in Lebanon. The leadership is optimistic about Israel's victory after having successfully delivered several blows

against Hezbollah's senior leadership, as well as pulling off unexpected tactical successes in the form of [detonating pagers](#) and walkie-talkies against Hezbollah operatives.[\[xi\]](#)

The truth is that after a year at war, Israel is not achieving its aims in Gaza, faces another quagmire in Lebanon and the war with Iran is no longer invisible.

Iran

The Israeli aggression has been followed by global calls for de-escalation. The US and the UK have sanctimoniously lectured Iran not to target Israel further. Iran's Arab neighbours have condemned the attacks, and India has reiterated its call to "exercise restraint and return to the path of dialogue and diplomacy" and that the "ongoing hostilities are to nobody's benefit".[\[xii\]](#)

Iran feels that it cannot leave its allies in the 'Axis of Resistance' alone at a time when they are confronting Israel. Moreover, Israel has been targeting Iranian generals and scientists before 07 Oct. Further, the Iranian missile strikes targeting Israel in mid-April the first time when Tehran directly hit Israel were prompted by the bombing of an Iranian diplomatic facility in Damascus, widely believed to be the handiwork of Israel.

The next phase of this geopolitical tussle will depend on the Iranian reaction to the Israeli provocation. Tehran's Foreign Ministry has issued an ambiguous statement, observing that while the Islamic Republic wanted "regional peace", the country was "entitled ... to defend itself". [\[xiii\]](#)

But Iranian proxy response options have been limited by the damage done to both Hamas and Hezbollah and the fact that the US has bolstered Israeli air defences with the deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense ballistic missile defences.

However, beyond this set of direct exchanges, the progress of fighting in Gaza and Lebanon remains a potential trigger for further confrontation. Iran will continue to help Hezbollah rebuild, and there is still a possibility that Israel will target Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps personnel in Lebanon or Syria.[\[xiv\]](#)

The US and the UK have justified Israel's actions by saying that Israel has a right to self-defence. For Israel, the underlying points of friction remain the progress of Iran's nuclear programme, Iranian proxy activity across the region and the status of Israeli hostages.[\[xv\]](#)

The truth is that neither appears to want a full-blown conflict, yet they are testing the elasticity of each other's red lines in this game of strike and counterstrike. But calculations regarding an interpretation of a scale of attack can go horribly wrong.

Conclusion

This is a moment for the global community to press for de-escalation in the region. They must call for an immediate, unconditional ceasefire in Gaza, and an end to Israel's aggression in Lebanon. Without this the war underway will only intensify.

In his State of the Union Address, US President Joe Biden had stated that "the only real solution to the situation is a two-state solution". In May, US' National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said that "a two-state solution is the only way to ensure a strong, secure, Jewish, democratic state of Israel, as well as a future of dignity, security, and prosperity for the Palestinian people". US Vice President Kamala Harris has also promoted a two-state solution, describing it as the "only path" forward.

But with continued US support to Israel, these statements seem divorced from reality. Israel currently believes it is on a path of ascendancy and there are analysts who feel that Israel wants to goad Iran into a direct conflict with it and the US, which will be disastrous.

There is, therefore, an urgent need to arrest the negative spiral and carnage currently underway in the region. The situation has been escalating into the very regional war that diplomacy was designed to avert. It is now imperative to promote security and stability in this tumultuous region

Endnotes

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