



HAMAS-ISRAEL CONFLICTS IN GAZA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MIDDLE EAST STABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The Middle East has been marked by significant volatility since the post-World War II era, witnessing over ten wars between the Arabs and Israelis alone from 1948 to 2023. Thus, this study focuses on the Hamas-Israel conflict in Gaza and its implications for Middle East stability. The study is methodologically structured in qualitative method whereby data are drawn from secondary sources. Several major conflicts, including Operation Cast Lead (2008), Southern Israel Cross-Border Attacks (August 2011), Operation Return Echo (March 2012), Operation Pillar of Defence (November 2012), and Operation "Swords of Iron" (2023), are used as case studies in this work due to their strategic significance and decisive impacts on the affected nations and the broader Middle East region. This study argues that the unfolding wars involving Hamas and Israel have profound repercussions across the region, particularly for Egypt and Jordan, which have historically been key peacemakers with Israel. Furthermore, the humanitarian crisis and Israeli military actions have raised concerns about mass displacement, further straining Israel's relations with other Arab countries and even in Europe, where the Palestinian issue resonates deeply. Lastly, this short war has exacerbated the already fragile state of peace in the Middle East.

KEYWORDS: Middle East; Palestine; Israel; Hamas; Muslim Brotherhood.

INTRODUCTION

The Muslim Brotherhood '(an Islamic movement in Palestine before Hamas) had evaded active resistance against the Israeli occupation.

However, the emergence of Intifada transformed the limited focus of Brotherhood on religious and social issues into active participation of Brotherhood to counter the Israeli occupation.

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The intensity of the Intifada steered the Brotherhood to create Hamas from its ranks. The Gaza Strip became the hotspot for intifada activities and, eventually, the establishment of Hamas. By early 1988, Hamas had expanded its organization to the West Bank. However, in the West Bank, it encountered various difficulties for the establishment of a potent and viable organization as compared to its development in Gaza. The main objective of Hamas, as expressed in the 1988 charter and later political statements, implies resistance against the occupation of Israel in Palestine, particularly in Gaza and the West Bank. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the struggle underwent various political and historical phases.

This paper aims to delve into the Hamas-Israel conflict in Gaza and its implications for stability in the Middle East. To achieve this goal, several major conflicts will be examined as case studies, including Operation Cast Lead (2008), Southern Israel Cross-Border Attacks (August 2011), Operation Return Echo (March 2012), Operation Pillar of Defense (November 2012), and Operation "Swords of Iron" (2023). These conflicts are selected for their strategic significance and decisive impacts on the affected nations and the broader Middle East region.

The study argues that the ongoing conflicts involving Hamas and Israel have profound repercussions across the region, particularly for countries like Egypt and Jordan, which have historically played crucial roles as peacemakers with Israel. Additionally, the humanitarian crisis and Israeli military actions have raised concerns about mass displacement, exacerbating tensions and further straining Israel's relations not only with other Arab countries but also with European nations, where the Palestinian issue resonates deeply. Ultimately, these conflicts have exacerbated the already fragile state of peace in the Middle East, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive solutions to achieve lasting stability in the region.

PALESTINE

Palestine is considered an important part of the Arab world and the Middle East, both in ancient and recent history (Bowersock, 1985). Palestine, as a central part of the Middle East, formed an important commercial crossroad in the past and remains so today. It links Asia with Africa while being the way to India and the rest of Asia, with Europe, and with the rest of the world.



Map 1: Historical Map of Palestine (1947)

Source: National Geographic Magazine, USA, 1947.

In addition, Palestine has a mosaic history and cultures, making it a cradle for the three monotheistic religions in the world: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Several civilizations have converged in this small spot of land; whereas the ancient empires sought to control this region and succeeded, the new superpowers are striving to control or at least to cast an influence on this region for military and economic reasons, and sometimes for prestige.

The Arab world, including Palestine, was for centuries a part of Islamic empires; the last Islamic entity that governed this region was the Ottoman Empire. For a long time, through this period and before, Palestine was the battlefield and the goal of competition between ancient empires and religious empires, especially between Christianity and Islam. Napoleon's campaign was to control the Levant (east) (Caquet, 2013). It was an important region in order to achieve hegemony and maintain French territorial interests.

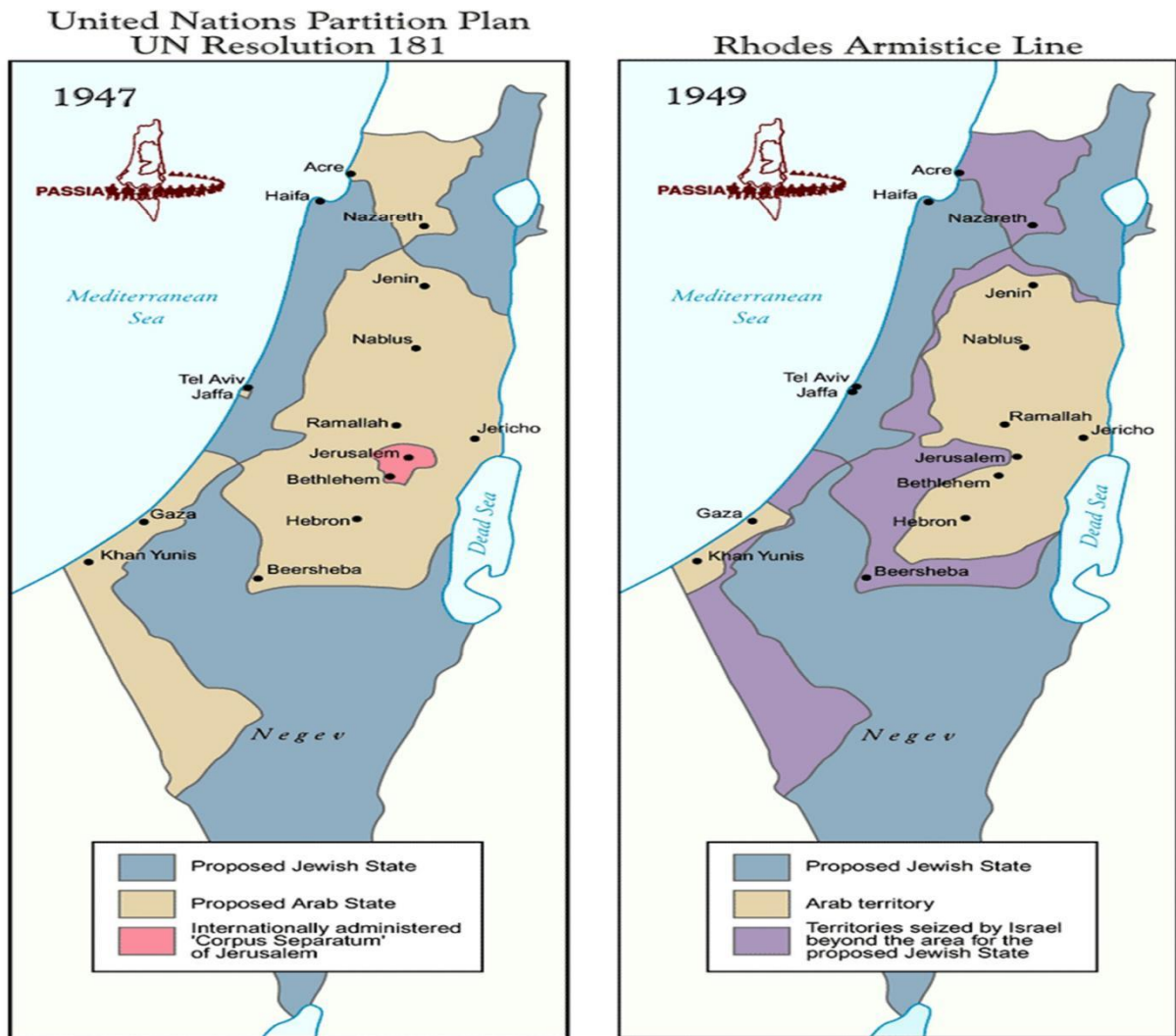
This attempt promoted and provoked Britain to take action and to challenge this expansion, whose aim was to keep the commercial way to India out of threat.

Britain and France, along with the other states, had reached an agreement to solve the issue of competition between them on the question of controlling the region by dividing it into areas of influence through the Sykes-Picot agreement in December 1915, which gave Syria and Lebanon to France, and Britain got Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine (Gause III, 2011). This period witnessed important developments in the Arab world. The appearance of Arab nationalism emerged due to several events. First was the confrontation between the Arabs and the Turks, who tried to convert the Arabs into Turks. Second was the civilizational friction, especially a result of Napoleon's campaign that contributed to the modernity of the region with the entry of typing machines and new western ideas, as well as, after that, the ideas of liberalism and the French Revolution. Third, the Egyptians attempted to gather these new experiences in order to be open to western ideas and civilization and the emergence of Muhammad Ali, who tried to unite the Arabs (Lockman, 2022). In addition, the missionary colleges and schools in Egypt and Palestine had contributed to encouraging awareness of politics among Arabs.

This awareness included the Palestinians; the Egyptians were the leaders, but the Palestinians were very active. A British consulate in Jerusalem was established for the first time in 1839 as a consequence of the agreement with the Ottoman Empire to protect the interests of Christians, Jews, and Druze minorities, as indicated in its reports of Palestinian activities (Khalid & Yiğit, 2020). The Palestinians supported Ahmed's 'Urabi revolution in Egypt in 1882 through demonstrations in

Jerusalem and Jaffa. In addition, the reports have pointed to several activities, like the establishment of social institutes, cultural clubs, conferences, and news campaigns against Jewish immigration and controlling the land by buying it (Lawson, 2023). Other activities included denying estate agents, demonstrations, sending missions to Turkey to meet government officials to convince them to cancel the Jewish privileges, especially in paying taxes, and the appearance of organized Arab movements in Palestine (Wright, 1926). Military clashes with the Jewish settlers also began after the Palestinian farmers were thrown out of their land (Mlabis "Petah Tikvah," the first Jewish settlement in Palestine) (Amiran, 1953). However, the officials of the Ottoman Empire, in favour of the Jews, took measures against the Palestinian newspapers, closing some of them for a determined period, or forever, and restraining the free movement of the Palestinian nationalist leaders.

The most important event that influenced the Palestinians and the Arabs in the formal rank and the popular rank was the Balfour Declaration in 1917, which included the British promise for the Jews to have their homeland in Palestine (Saeed, 2023). It is important to indicate that this promise was made before Britain practiced its mandate on Palestine, which was brought into effect in 1919. It means that Britain took the mandate on Palestine just to implement the Balfour promise for the Jews. The Jewish leaders achieved this through negotiation with the British. The three main factors that led to the Balfour Declaration were World War I, the influence of the Zionist leaders in London, and sympathy for the idea of a Jewish homeland. This declaration increased the Palestinian rejection of Britain and Jewish immigration, the strikes between the years 1936–1939, and subsequent military actions. Moreover, there was a refusal of all the proposals and other decisions to divide Palestine into two nations (Map 2).



Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA)

Map 2: United Nations Partition Plan UN Resolution 181 and Rhodes Armistice
Source: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, Jerusalem Palestine.

However, the British government provided the Jews with all the facilities they needed to increase immigration, control the land, and increase their military force, which helped them declare the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 (Degani, 2015).

The Arab states declared war against Israel, which resulted in the Arab states' defeat, and the Palestinians suffered due to forceful transfers out of their homes, which is known as the Nakba (the Palestinian catastrophe) (Manna, 2022). The new situation was an important stage in the political life of the Palestinians because it brought about a change in the elites and the rise of new socioeconomic classes that emerged from the old rich families and elites in the leadership. This period was distinguished by the hegemony of the Arab states on Palestinian issues; all the strategic decisions were taken by the leaders of those states without any sort of contribution from the Palestinian side, like the creation of the Arab High Comity and, after that, the declaration of the entire Palestinian government in Gaza in 1948 (Khalidi, 2014). The Palestinians were far from making decisions, so they were just passive observers; moreover, some of those leaders had loyalty to the Arab leaders or parties.

Thus, in that period, it was difficult to witness a Palestinian diplomacy different from the Arab one. However, it is possible to indicate that there was a distinction between practice and principles related to Arab nationalism, diplomacy, and the conflict with Israel because the Arabs mainly adopted military means to liberate the Arab-occupied land, but in reality, they did not allow the Palestinians to play a role in the struggle.

INCEPTION OF HAMAS: AN OFFSHOOT OF MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

Hamas, an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya, is a Palestinian Islamist branch that emerged in 1987 as an offshoot of the Palestinian branch of the Egypt-based Muslim Brotherhood (Levitt, 2006). In its reasoning and make-up, Hamas shares a place with the domain of the Muslim Brotherhood in the region. Its parent organisation, the Muslim Brotherhood, was first established in Egypt in 1928. As a significant

Islamist movement, it is considered to be the mother of all Islamic organisations in the Arab region. Over the past eight decades, the Muslim Brotherhood has established its branches almost in every Arab country, blending religion and politics to the highest degree. The relationship of Ikhwanul Muslims with Palestine began in 1935, when Hasan al-Banna's brother Abd-al-Rahman al-Banna visited Palestine and met with the mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Huseini (Minardi, 2019). During the Palestine revolt of 1936, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood carried out its propagandistic activities on behalf of the Palestinians. The organisation formed a General Central Committee to aid Palestine, and under the leadership of Hasan al-Banna, it led a significant protest against British policies in Palestine (Minardi, 2019). In the aftermath of the 1936 revolts, the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt extended its support and influence in Palestine and established the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jerusalem on October 26th, 1945 (Minardi, 2019).

Until 1947, there were about twenty-five Brotherhood branches in Palestine, with a membership ranging from twelve thousand to twenty thousand active members. These branches were under the supervision of a Muslim Brotherhood leader in Palestine. The use of the mufti's name helped this organisation spread its influence further in Palestine. The Brotherhood's position on Palestine increased its societal popularity after it actively participated in the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948. Although the Brotherhood took a relatively moderate stand on the Palestinian crisis, many small radical groups sprouted from it over the decades. The influence of its leading thinkers, mainly Sayyed Qutob, had an enormous impact on various strands of this organization. The main objective of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in West Asia was to establish Islamic states in each of their countries and to unite every Islamic ummah into one single ummah. At the political level, its members enjoyed parliamentary legitimacy or government posts in Jordan, Morocco, Iraq, Egypt, Algeria, Sudan, Yemen, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Besides that, the organisation came to be represented in the

outlawed opposition in states such as Libya, Tunisia, Syria, and Saudi Arabia.

In its initial years, the Muslim Brotherhood engaged mainly in social services and built some prominent mosques, schools, and hospitals. An example of building up local community service projects that it would later reproduce in other Egyptian urban areas and towns. During the time of its formation, it was one of the other religious organisations that attempted to fortify the adherence of Islam and combat the threat of the spread of western cultural values and lifestyles in a context of rapid social and political change. Under al-Banna's excellence, the brotherhood became a popular national organisation with a protracted membership network of social and welfare institutions. Under his generous excellence, the branches of the Brotherhood organisation rose from four in 1929, followed by two thousand in 1949 (Bayat, 2007). By the mid-1940s, its membership had grown up to 300 to 600,000 members, respectively. The Brotherhood initially established its official branches in the West Bank in 1946. In the aftermath of its establishment, the movement created more chapters after Jordan conquered the West Bank territory in the first Arab-Israeli war. Islamic organisations subsequently extended into the Gaza Strip, where Egypt had taken military control. However, in 1948, after the formation of Israel was proclaimed and subsequent to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip by Jordan and Egypt, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood was divided into two separate organisations for geographic reasons (Bayat, 2007).

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood participated in the 1948 war against the British by sending many volunteers to battle for Palestine with the Egyptian armed force. After the existence of Israel in 1948, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood was physically separated into two sections: one in the West Bank under the customs of Jordan, which joined the Jordanian Branch of the Muslim Brotherhood as the Gaza-based branch came under the Egyptian administration and was inclined towards the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. By the war of 1967, new political truths were brought into being, and the whole

province of Palestine, including the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, fell under Israeli occupation. The two wings of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood came closer to each other and created unitary structures over the years. During the late 1980s, on the more extensive Palestinian political scene, resistance and democratic developments had outpaced the Muslim Brotherhood in both Gaza and the West Bank. The Fatah group, or Palestinian National Liberation Movement, and the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) remained the dominant national groups that ruled Palestinian governmental issues for decades. The belief system of the Muslim Brotherhood organisation is primarily centred around the change of existing political frameworks in the Arab world. It grasped the possibility of political activism and social duties and remained dedicated to solving the socio-religious issues in Palestine. Predominant Palestinians supported their social and specialised social services and accomplished their political and religious objectives.

There have been various shifts in the Muslim Brotherhood's philosophy throughout the years. The movement became a functional member of the nationalistic resistance movement for a prohibited group. The movement was compelled to work underground, inclining towards an outfitted battle for their belief system, mainly because predominant reformists throughout the Arab states barred this group. The movement had consistently clung to the welfare of the general public and represented Islamic laws and ethics throughout the Arab region. The movement stopped its float towards secularism in Egypt and other Arab nations at the time and looked to counter the outside (Western) influence by urging an Islamic culture on the statutes of the Quran.

Besides that, the 1980s era witnessed a rapid growth in the power of the Muslim Brotherhood. On the eve of Arab-Israeli uprisings, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood decided to undertake a significant transformation within its movement. It established Hamas as an adjunct organization with the specific mission of confronting the Israeli occupation (Küntzel, 2023). When the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood was

immersed in its religious programs in the early 1980s, the Islamic Jihad offered a new version of nationalist Islam, which incorporated the armed struggle against Israel into the heart of Islamic discourse and practice (Skare, 2021). Between 1982 and 1987, the Islamic Jihad posed a severe challenge to the Muslim Brotherhood because of its passive military resistance against the Israeli occupation. It also raised an equal challenge to the other nationalist factions whose main criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood concerned its deferment of confrontation with the occupation (Skare, 2021). The PLO was a nationalist group but lacked an Islamic dimension. Similarly, the Palestinian MB was Islamist enough but required a nationalist size. The Islamic Jihad combined both components and had ended what it had seen to be a disconnection between Islam and Palestine.

CHARTER OF HAMAS

On August 17th, 1988, the Hamas movement published its official charter. The Charter was drafted by Abdul Fattah Dukhan before it passed on to the administrative bureaus of Muslim Brotherhood in West and Gaza (Karakaya, 2021). The key points were; total rejection of the State of Israel and asserting that the land of Palestine is an Islamic land consecrated for future Muslim generation until judgment day, emphasis on armed struggle as the only way of liberation, rejection of negotiation with any power as it contradicted the principles of Islamic movement and an Islamic identity that conformed with Islamic teachings. The pamphlets of the Charter were distributed widely to the Hamas' Shura Council for their acceptance. It was appropriated generally around the same time in Kuwait, Jordan, and Palestine. In the Charter, Hamas announced itself to be a wing of the MB in Palestine and one of its expansions, expressing that the movement's programme is Islam. From it, it draws its ideas, ways of thinking, and understanding of the universe, life, and man. It resorts to it for judgement in all its conduct, and it is inspired by it for the guidance of its steps. The objectives of the movement were described as fighting against the false, defeating it, and vanquishing it so that justice could prevail,

homelands would be retrieved from their mosques, and the voice of the mu'azen would emerge, declaring the establishment of the state of Islam, so that the people and things would return each to their right places. The Charter stated further, The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf - consecrated for future Moslem generations until Judgement Day (Bartal, 2016). It, or any part of it, should not be squandered. It, or any part of it, should not be given up. Hamas believes that there is no solution to the Palestinian question except through Jihad, and that the liberation of Palestine is then an individual duty for every Muslim, wherever he may be.

Hamas' Charter expressed its keenness on teaching Muslim ages and gave Muslim women a role no less significant than that of men in the fight for liberation. The movement perceives other Islamic movements with respect and appreciates and respects the resistance movements of Palestine, including the PLO movement; nonetheless, Hamas simultaneously dismissed the possibility of secularism, announcing that it can't prompt liberation. Hamas emphasised itself as a humanistic movement. It takes care of human rights and is guided by Islamic tolerance when dealing with the followers of other religions. It does not antagonise anyone of them except if it is offended by it or stands in its way to hamper its moves and waste its efforts. Significantly, Hamas dealt with the Charter just like a historical document that expressed the vision of extensive fragments of the Muslim Brotherhood at that time, not really as an authoritative and administering constitution-like reference. There were inside critiques concerning a few terms and political phrases used in the Charter, particularly those associated with Jews. At the same time, the leaders of Hamas were keen on using political discourse that kept away the possibility of being blamed for anti-Semitism or of battling Jews for being Jews.

It should be noted that the opponents of Hamas quote the Charter much more than Hamas individuals and leaders themselves do. So much so that it appeared within Hamas' ranks as though the group's members had forgotten it. However,

Hamas' expanded worldwide presence and expanding allegations of anti-Semitism and inflexibility against Hamas, by citing things from the Charter, fortified the opinion inside Hamas during al-Aqsa Intifada, particularly between 2003 and 2005, which the time had come to reformulate it (Al-Arja & Abdallah, 2005). Be that as it may, Hamas' triumph in the January 2006 elections and ensuing blockade and pressure also put it on hold, lest it be thought that Hamas had amended its charter in response to external forces.

The publication of the Hamas charter in August 1988 eradicated doubts that eyewitnesses may have had about the stance of the movement towards the relevance of jihad with regards to the intifada. The significance of jihad is continuously stressed throughout the 36-article text. The charter proclaimed that there is no possible solution to the Palestinian question except jihad. The Hamas' role inside this rubric was made unequivocal in Article 6 of the text. Hamas is a connection in the train of jihad against the Zionist invasion. At the pinnacle of the intifada, Palestinians, in an extraordinary campaign of non-violent resistance to end the Israeli occupation, were approaching the populace to transform the battle into a sacred war.

For Hamas, the jihad radiated from the mosques and typified Palestinian individuals to their—authentic Islamic identity and belonging, a line of contention that will undoubtedly resound emphatically with a sizeable constituency (Hamid, 2018). The Intifada, as an insider phenomenon, catapulted Hamas to the centre stage of Palestinian politics at the expense of the PLO and its various factions. As indicated by its first report, Hamas views a settlement as subjugation to the Zionists'. Further, the authors state that the intifada comes to awaken the consciences of those among us who are gasping after a sick peace, after empty international conferences, and after treasonous partial settlements like Camp David' (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010). As such, they make a clear reference to the Camp David Accords of 1978, which were signed by Israel, Egypt, and the United States. The Accords contained a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt and an Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai

Peninsula and the West Bank. The parties likewise consented to set up a self-governing, self-overseeing specialist in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010). Nonetheless, through its communiqué, Hamas offered an articulation of its discontent with the Camp David Accords and any other peace initiative that it thought was treasonous and incomprehensible. The Charter touches upon efforts towards a peaceful solution to the conflict. Notwithstanding, it states in Article 13 that the activities, what is known as a 'tranquil arrangement' and international conferences to determine the Palestinian issues, are in opposition to the belief system of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Baconi, 2018). As for international initiatives and conferences, they are a waste of time, a kind of child's play'. Hamas renounces any conceivable settlement, as it considers peace meetings as close to a method for constraining the rule of unbelievers in the place that is known for the Muslims' (Article 13).

HAMAS AND THE ISLAMIC JIHAD WARS WITH ISRAEL

Islamic Jihad (Al-Jihad Al-Islami fi Filastin) started during the 1970s among Palestinian students in Cairo, eminently Fathi Shiqaqi, a previous radical who became disappointed with the common Palestinian developments and joined the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (Esposito, 1990). By the mid-1970s, he had rejected the lessons of the Brotherhood, which held that the pulverisation of Israel must anticipate an internal jihad to change and bring together the Islamic world, and grasped the 1979 upheaval in Iran as a model of activity (Armes, 2010).

Hamas, conversely, stays focused on the Muslim Brotherhood and views itself as the Palestinian wing of the Brotherhood. In spite of the fact that various other radical Palestinian Islamists propelled by the Islamic Republic in Tehran embraced the name Islamic Jihad as a spread for the psychological oppressor movement, the group began by Shiqaqi and is the one that twists today. Following the death of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat in 1981, Shiqaqi was removed from the nation and came back to Gaza, where he officially

settled Islamic Jihad (Armes, 2010). In contrast to Hamas, which came out of the social welfare arrangement and kept running as the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood even before its establishment under the name Hamas, Islamic Jihad endeavoured to build up a social and instructive foundation or pull in a mass after.

Shiqaqi accepted that a crusade of terrific psychological oppressor assaults against Israel for the sake of progressive Islam would motivate a widespread revolt (Skare, 2010). In the wake of verifying subsidising from Iran's mullahs, who had finished their initial tease with the P.L.O. and were on edge to support similarly invested (if Sunni) Palestinian progressives, Shiqaqi started building up the gathering's military mechanical assembly, the Jerusalem Brigades (Saraya al-Quds), which began doing assaults against Israeli fighters in the mid-1980s (Skare, 2010). The most infamous was the Gate of Moors activity in October 1986, when Islamic Jihad agents threw hand explosives at military-enlisted people going to an acceptance function close to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, injuring seventy and murdering the father of a warrior.

In 1988, after going through two years in an Israeli jail for carrying arms into Gaza, Shiqaqi was ousted to Lebanon, and the next year he set up a home office in Damascus, Syria. This change brought Islamic Jihad pioneers into direct contact with Iranian authorities just because of the Islamic Republic's international safe havens in Beirut and Damascus. In contrast to Hamas, which endeavoured to spread its outer political and military foundation over a few unique nations during the 1990s and came to depend principally on Syria directly after its exercises were shortened somewhere else, the Islamic Jihad nearness abroad has consistently been amassed in Syria and Syrian-involved Lebanon. Islamic Jihad agents before long started preparing at Hezbollah camps in Lebanon, under the supervision of Iranian Revolutionary Guards positioned in the nation, and did some everyday tasks with Hezbollah against Israeli powers in south Lebanon during the 1990s. Islamic Jihad and Hamas were savage opponents in the late 1980s and mid-1990s (Skare, 2010). To a great extent, this is a

consequence of ideological contrasts identifying with Islamic Jihad's partiality for—and Hamas' dismissal of—Iranian Khomeinism and the guideline of wilayat al-faqih, that is, rule by the jurisprudent (entrusting the administration to priests).

Additionally, while the two gatherings became out of the Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic Jihad underestimated the role of the social movement for aggressor action. The Hamas offered unmistakable quality to social welfare action and conversion (dawa), even as it excessively. Below are some of the conflicts with Israel.

OPERATION CAST LEAD (2008)

Israel and Hamas indirectly agreed through Egyptian mediation to the six-month ceasefire in June 2008 (Shalom, 2019). In exchange for a freeze on attacks, Hamas perceived that Israel would open the Gaza border crossings to allow a flow of goods and workers. One genuine aim of the ceasefire was to facilitate a prisoner exchange agreement—Israel's emancipation of a number of Palestinian prisoners in return for Hamas' release of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit. During the first five months, the truce held comparatively well. Some rockets were fired into Israel, but most of them were connected to the non-Hamas militant factions, and, later, Hamas seemed gradually more competent and willing to repress even these attacks. No fatalities were reported (only negligible property damages), and Israel remained unresponsive. Israel highlighted the periodic rocket fires as justification for maintaining the border crossing, and Gaza's seaport was blocked for almost everything, even the basic humanitarian supplies. Hamas and many Arab leaders and international organisations busy facilitating aid to Gazan civilians blamed Israel for noncompliance with its promises under the agreement. Israel believed that the pressure applied via a blockade could overthrow Hamas from power by turning Gazans against an Islamist group. The total closure of the highly reliant Gazan economy's population burdens Israel and its well-wishers with the charge that they are worsening the already dangerous situation of Gaza's civilian population, one of the most densely populated

(Gaza's 1.5 million people live within an area of 146 square miles) and poorest in the world (Shalom, 2019).

On November 4, the ceasefire was broken. A month and a half before its natural term, Israeli tanks entered a few hundred metres into the Gaza Strip under the cover of the Israeli Air Force. The official justification was that the tanks were attempting to destroy a tunnel that Israel believed was being used in an attempt to capture Israeli soldiers. During the offensive, six Hamas militants were killed. The Hamas' military wing responded quickly and fired dozens of rockets against Israeli cities in the Negev. Between November and December 2008, Israeli sources estimate, almost 200 rockets and more than 100 mortars had fallen across Gaza's border, into the Kibbutzim and town in Negev, and north towards Ashkelon.

On December 27, 2008, Israel launched an extensive military campaign known as "Operation Cast Lead" against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, with the aim of countering Hamas rocket fires into southern Israel and, generally, severely weakening all aspects of Hamas rule in Gaza (Finkelstein, 2015). In fact, very few figures from the Hamas military wing had expected such an overwhelming show of strength from Israel. The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) launched the offensive at 11:30 a.m. on that Saturday with a surprise airstrike campaign that targeted police stations and security premises. It was a devastating attack, not only due to the high number of victims among the policemen and young recruits but also to the timing, which coincided with the school arrival and departure times, and so involved almost all of Gaza's students. At 11:30, the airstrike sparked a state of panic among the hundreds of thousands of students in the streets of Gaza, several of whom were killed. It was only the beginning of a very short and very bloody military campaign, one that could be compared with the 33-day Israel-Lebanon war in the summer of 2006 (Finkelstein, 2015).

The entire Gaza Strip was pounded by airstrikes, artillery bombardments, and infantry attacks, many of which were unreported or only distantly reported by the independent foreign journalists,

who were, for the entire duration of the operation, not allowed to enter the Gaza Strip by Israeli authorities. of the Wafah, Mahmud Besides Hamas weapons seizures and bombardment of military facilities, Israel has targeted other elements of Gaza's infrastructure that it believes support Hamas' military objectives, including mosques, the Islamic University of Gaza, Hamas Al-Aqsa television station, the homes of Hamas militants and government officials, a wide range of government buildings, and a web of smuggler tunnels by the side of the border with Egypt. Israel airstrikes killed senior Hamas officials and militants, including Hamas Interior Minister Said Siam, Salah Abu Shrahk (head of Hamas's general security service), Mahmud Wafah, and Sheikh Nizar Rayyan (influential figures of the Hamas military wing). The casualty counts of the 22-day Israeli military campaign were shocking, even considering the difference between the numbers collected by NGOs and those collected by international organizations. UNRWA states that "almost 1,400 Palestinians, including 347 children and 209 women, were killed, and a further 5,300 persons were wounded (Arrigoni, 2015). The attacks targeted military and civilian structures as well. Around a quarter of all housing stock—more specifically, the homes of 59,779 families—was damaged or destroyed, affecting more than 300,000 individuals (Arrigoni, 2015).

On January 9, 2008, some Hamas leaders crossed Rafah to negotiate the ceasefire. Among them were Jamal Abu Hashem, Salah al-Bardawil, and Ayman Taha. Each of them represented a different generation inside the Hamas: the founders, the middle generation, and the youth, this last represented by Ayman Taha, then 38 years old, and himself, the son of the highly profiled Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza (Milton-Edwards, 2014). Hamas selected its envoys among the officials known widely for their capabilities as mediators. Over the course of several weeks, several meetings were held in Cairo with Egyptian government officials, Hamas leaders from Gaza, and movement members from the political bureau. The Damascus-based office sent the second-in-command in the political chain, Mussa Abu Marzouq, as well as Mohammed Nasr,

considered the man nearest to Khaled Mishaal (Milton-Edwards, 2014).

As Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip ended, the situation in the Middle East considerably changed. The death toll due to the bombardment was high, and the humanitarian crisis was self-evident. Even Israel experienced a dramatically weakened position due to the strong accusations made by the international community that Israel had used brutal force. Operation Cast Lead was a failure for Israel, not only with respect to the international community but also with respect to its own relationship with the dual leadership of Palestine. During the operation, Israel had performed targeted assassination attempts against senior Hamas ministers, notably the Interior Minister Said Siam, but the flexibility of the Hamas movement's structure had already survived similar assassinations and remained unaffected by the new attempts. Moreover, Israel had failed to bring any serious damage to the foundations of Hamas's infrastructure by repeatedly bombing the movement's office, which Israel viewed as important for the organisation.

SOUTHERN ISRAEL CROSS: BORDER ATTACKS (AUGUST 2011)

On August 18, 2011, a series of coordinated cross-border attacks occurred in Israel, particularly in the southern region near the border (Boms & Cohen, 2022). The attacks, characterized by a series of similar assaults and reciprocal covering fire, were carried out by a group of possibly twelve militants organized into four units. These incidents occurred despite prior alerts to Israel's interior service, Shin Bet, regarding potential militant activity in the area, prompting the deployment of Israeli troops. The militants initially targeted Egged Bus No. 392, firing upon it while it was travelling along Highway 12 in the Negev region near Eilat (Boms & Cohen, 2022). Subsequently, an explosion occurred near an Israeli army patrol along the border with Egypt. In a separate attack, an anti-tank missile struck a private vehicle, resulting in the deaths of four civilians. The casualties included eight Israelis, comprising six civilians, one Yamam special unit police sniper, and one soldier from the Golani

Brigade. The Israel Defence Forces reported that they neutralised eight attackers during the incident. Additionally, Egyptian security forces were reported to have killed two other attackers during the same period.

Five Egyptian soldiers were also killed. As stated by Egypt, they were killed by Israeli defense forces pursuing militants across the Egyptian border, although an Israeli military official initially said they were killed by a suicide bomber who had escaped across the border into Egypt. These five deaths of soldiers caused a diplomatic rift between Israel and Egypt and led to mass protests outside the Israeli embassy in Cairo. According to news bulletins, Egypt threatened to withdraw its ambassador from Israel; however, it was later denied by the Egyptian foreign minister. Israel expressed grief for the deaths and sent an apology letter to Egypt. The Israel Defence Forces were ordered to conduct a military investigation of the incident, and on August 25, 2011, Israel was allowed to conduct a mutual investigation with Egypt of the incident.

The identity of the militants, three of whom were Egyptian, as reported, is not widely accepted, and until now no group has taken responsibility for the attacks. The Israeli government blamed the Palestinian Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), a Gaza-based alliance of Palestinian militant factions, for organising the attacks, but the PRC refutes its involvement. However, Israel immediately attacked seven targets in the Gaza Strip just after the terror attacks in the Negev, in which five members of the PRC were killed along with its leader.

On August 21, 2011, an unofficial ceasefire was called by Hamas and Israel after days of fierce fighting in which fifteen Palestinians were killed and several were wounded. Israel witnessed more than 100 rockets and mortar shells fired from Gaza into Israel, which killed one Israeli and wounded more than a dozen (Aljamal, 2014). The truce was broken almost instantly due to rocket fire from Gaza on southern Israel, followed by retaliatory Israeli airstrikes that caused the deaths of almost seven Palestinians, along with two leaders of the Islamic Jihad. On August 26, 2011, a second ceasefire was called by Gaza's militants. The

secretary-general of the Popular Resistance Committees, Zuhir al-Qaisi, was killed on March 9, 2012, in an Israeli air strike. Zuhir al-Qaisi was considered by Israel “one of the masterminds” of the August 18, 2011 terrorist attacks (Aljamal, 2014).

OPERATION RETURN ECHO (MARCH 2012)

Operation Returning Echo was an Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) military operation in the Gaza Strip from March 9 to March 14, 2012. It was the most horrible eruption of hostility covered by the media in the territory since Operation Cast Lead or the Gaza War of 2008–2009. On March 9, 2012, Israel launched a targeted air attack in the Gaza Strip, which killed the secretary general of the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), Zohair al-Qaisi. Another Palestinian militant was also killed in the attack, which also gravely wounded a man nearby. As stated by the IDF, although the PRC repudiates this, Zohair al-Qaisi directed the 2011 southern Israel cross-border attacks, which killed eight Israelis and six civilians. Israeli officials said that he was planning the final stages of a new mega-attack that could have taken many lives. Palestinian fighters retaliated by launching rocket attacks on Israel, with more than 300 Grad missiles, mortar shells, and Qassam rockets fired, of which 177 struck Israeli territory, 124 hitting the main urban centres of Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Beersheba, besides smaller communities. Twenty-three Israelis were wounded, mostly civilians, and schools all over southern Israel remained closed for almost the entire week to save students from rocket fire. Israel’s Iron Dome missile defence system intercepted several rockets fired by Palestinian militants directed towards big cities and destroyed 56 rockets in 71 attempts. Israel attacked with 37 air strikes and targeted Gazan weapons storage sites, weapon manufacturing facilities, rocket launch sites, centres, posts, tunnels, and militants, killing 22. Most of them were members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the others were from the Popular Resistance Committees. Four civilians were also killed in this attack. Approximately 74 Palestinians were reportedly wounded in the attack, largely civilians.

Officials from the United Nations criticised the Palestinian attacks, and the U.S. emphasised that Israel has the right to protect itself. The Organisation of the Islamic Conference, Egypt, Syria, the Arab League, and Iran strongly criticised Israel’s reactive air attacks on civilian populations. On March 13, Egypt mediated a truce between Palestinian militant factions and Israel. Hamas did not take part in the combat openly and asserted that a full-fledged war would “be destructive to the Palestinian people.”

OPERATION PILLAR OF DEFENSE (NOVEMBER 2012)

Operation Pillar of Defence (literally “Pillar of Cloud”) was an eight-day military operation by Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, formally launched on November 14, 2012, with the killing of Ahmed Jabari, head of the Gaza military wing of Hamas (Block, 2017). The operation was launched in reaction to Palestinian groups firing more than 100 rockets at Israel within a 24-hour period, a strike on an Israeli military patrol jeep inside Israeli borders by Gazan militants, and a tunnel blast caused by IEDs close to Israeli defence forces on the Israeli side of the fence. The Israeli government declared that the objectives of the military operation were to stop rocket attacks directed against civilian targets launching from the Gaza Strip and to weaken the potentialities of militant groups. The Palestinians accused the Israeli government of the rise in violence, blaming the IDF for attacks on Gazan civilians from the beginning of the operation and quoting the encirclement of the Gaza Strip and occupation of the West Bank, as well as East Jerusalem, as the major causes of rocket attacks. During the course of the operation, the IDF stated that it had targeted more than 1,500 locations in the Gaza Strip, as well as rocket launching sites, weapon depositories, governmental facilities, and apartment buildings. Gaza officials revealed that 133 Palestinians had been killed in the attack, of whom 53 were civilians, 79 militants, and a police officer, and assessed that 840 Palestinians were injured. A lot of families were dislocated. One air attack killed ten members of the al-Dalu family. Several Palestinian fatalities were caused by

misfired Palestinian rockets landing within the Gaza Strip. Eight Palestinians were put to death by members of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades for alleged cooperation with Israel.

Throughout the operation, the al-Qassam Brigades and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad further accelerated their rocket attacks on Israeli towns and cities in an operation code named **Operation Stones of Baked Clay** by the al-Qassam Brigades, firing more than 1,456 rockets into Israel and an extra 142 that landed within Gaza itself. Palestinian militant factions used weapons consisting of Iranian-made Fajr-5, Russian-made Grad rockets, Qassam rockets, and mortars. Some of these weapons were fired into Beersheba, Rishon LeZion, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and other major population centres; Tel Aviv was hit for the first time since the 1991 Gulf War; and rockets were fired at Jerusalem (Hadad, 2021). The rocket fires caused the deaths of three Israeli civilians in a direct hit on a house in Kiryat Malachi. Till the termination of the operation, six Israelis had been killed, 240 were wounded, and almost 200 had been treated for nervousness by Magen David Adom. Israel's Iron Dome missile defence system intercepted almost 421 rockets; another 142 rockets landed within Gaza itself; 875 rockets fell in open areas; and 58 rockets hit urban areas in Israel. A bus in Tel Aviv was bombed by an Arab-Israeli, wounding 28 civilians (Jütte, 2020).

HAMAS AND ISRAELI WAR 2023 (OPERATION "SWORDS OF IRON) AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR MIDDLE EAST STABILITY.

The Israeli military reacted angrily to Hamas' October 7, 2023, offensive on Israeli villages encircling the Israeli-besieged Gaza Strip, which resulted in 1,400 Israeli deaths and the capture of over 200 captives (Rabinovich, 2023). Israel's brutal reprisal since then has claimed hundreds of lives. Countless more will be lost in the assault if Israel sticks to its declared objective of neutralising Hamas's military capability. Since then, at least 17,487 Palestinians have died, according to data from the Gaza Health Ministry, while Israeli counts indicate that 1,200 civilians lost their lives in the Hamas assault on Israel (Saikal, 2024). Hundreds of thousands of people

have been uprooted, many of them without a place to return home. Though Gaza and Israel have absorbed the brunt of the violence the most, it has affected the whole area. Below is the implication of the war on Nations within the Middle East region:

JORDANIANS' POSITION ON THE HAMAS-ISRAELI WAR 2023

Jordanians were incensed by Israel's invasion of Gaza following Hamas's October 7, 2023, strike and the humanitarian disaster that followed. Long-standing concerns that Israel intends to forcibly relocate Palestinians from the West Bank into Jordan have also been fanned by rumours that it wants to expel the Palestinians living in Gaza. There have been daily protests from Jordanians all around the country. The scale of the protests in front of the Israeli and American embassies in Amman and around the city was massive. This crisis is the first time many Jordanians have ever participated in a public demonstration. King Abdullah II expressed concern over domestic and international turmoil, saying that "the whole region is on the brink of falling into the abyss" (Yergin, 2023 p. 42).

The prevailing belief among Jordan's political elite is that Israel harbours intentions to forcibly displace Palestinians from both Gaza and the West Bank. Discussions at the Social and Political Institute in Amman, featuring voices like former Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher, underscored this conviction. There's a fear that Israel's current military campaign might aim to expel Gaza's Palestinian population into Sinai and subsequently push West Bank Palestinians out as well. This fear is compounded by the unyielding support Israel receives from Western nations, which could embolden the Israeli right wing to target Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, potentially transforming Jordan into the de facto Palestinian homeland (Yergin, 2023).

Recent statements from Israeli politicians have only exacerbated these concerns. Instances like a member of the Israeli Knesset openly advocating for a "second Nakba" and Israeli settlers distributing leaflets threatening Palestinians with expulsion unless they relocate to Jordan intensify

apprehensions (Neuman, 2018). Moreover, the proposed legislation within the Israeli Knesset to authorise live fire against demonstrations by Palestinian citizens of Israel adds to the unease. While the forced displacement of Palestinians from the West Bank might not be an immediate likelihood, it remains a haunting prospect for many in Jordan due to its potentially dire consequences. The widespread opposition to Israel within Jordan risks prompting the government to reassess its peace treaty with Israel. Jordan's economy would suffer immensely from a mass influx of displaced Palestinians, and the ensuing demographic shift could disrupt the country's political stability, which has traditionally favoured Jordanians of non-Palestinian descent.

Additionally, Jordan holds a significant stake as the custodian of Jerusalem's Muslim and Christian holy sites. Escalation in Gaza could trigger unrest in Jerusalem and the West Bank, jeopardising Jordan's role in administering these revered places and fueling public outrage. While Jordan has expressed concerns about Israeli actions at these sites, the current situation remains relatively calm, although events like those on October 7 have not been explicitly addressed by Amman.

Given Israel's long history of enmity towards the prominent Shiite militia organisation Hizbollah, Lebanon is the most likely country to be pushed into a full-fledged conflict as a result of the escalating Gaza issue. Recent weeks have witnessed nearly constant firefights, which only reinforces this perception. It is true that every major political party in Lebanon has expressed its opposition to such a confrontation. Even in less worrying times, Hizbollah has maintained its own foreign policy, deciding when and how to utilise its huge arsenal without engaging the domestic political system. As a result, despite Hizbollah's claims that it wishes to avoid a larger battle, no group of Lebanese players can prevent it from fighting near the border between Lebanon and Israel, even though such conflicts put the country in constant danger of being drawn into a punishing conflict with its powerful southern neighbour.

The claims made by Hizbollah that it does not plan to wage war on Israel conflict slightly with the party line. The party views itself as part of the "axis of

resistance," which includes Hamas and Iran as well as other state and non-state organisations that fight Israel and the United States. The "axis of resistance" also includes the Houthis in Yemen, Syria, Iran, and many terrorist groups that operate in Iraq and Syria. In recent times, Hizbollah has highlighted strong collaboration between the members of this alliance as a strategic goal, and party officials have consistently warned Israel—long before the present crisis—that it could have to contend with a multi-front war. One of the main components of Hizbollah's deterrence strategy is these warnings.

Still, whether Hizbollah will be pulled towards restraint or action is not yet clear. Since 2006, when it fought a terribly destructive war with Israel, its backing for its ally Hamas in rounds of conflict with Israel, such as in April 2021, has been limited (Rodman, 2023). It has generally offered verbal support and, reportedly, strategic advice and intelligence sharing without directly participating in attacks on Israel from Lebanese soil. Yet given the serious threat to Hamas and the centrality of the Palestinian struggle to its ideological outlook, Hizbollah may yet feel compelled to come to its partner's aid in the current conflict. In his speech, Nasrallah warned that Hizbollah could escalate based on the extent of the Israeli war in Gaza and/or civilian casualties in Lebanon caused by Israeli bombing or shelling.

On the war's second day, Hizbollah carried out an unprovoked attack in the disputed Shebaa Farms area, which Israeli forces occupy and where Israel and Hizbollah have exchanged fire in the past. In the following days, cross-border incursions by Palestinian groups drew Israeli fire that killed Hizbollah fighters, initiating an escalatory dynamic that has been slowly building. In Until October 28, fighting was restricted to a strip of land along both sides of the border, some 5km deep, within the approximate range of the guided anti-tank ammunition that Hizbollah has been using. Since most civilians on both sides either fled or were evacuated, all reported casualties appear so far to have been combatants. In his three speeches, Nasrallah reported 57 losses (Israel claims to have killed 70) (Rodman, 2023). From its side, Hizbollah claims to have killed or injured 120

Israeli soldiers; Israel acknowledges six soldiers and one civilian killed. In the last days of October, both Hizbollah and Israel struck up to 15 kilometres into enemy territory, raising the likelihood of civilian casualties and, with it, the danger of accelerated escalation.

Hizbollah's leaders also appear resistant to any anti-war sentiment among Lebanon's Shiites, who would suffer the brunt of a war with Israel, though they would almost surely fall in line if the party decided to pursue such a battle. Shiite populations are concentrated in southern Lebanon, Beirut's southern suburbs, and sections of the Beqaa Valley. Israel has previously focused its shelling on these locations, particularly during the 2006 war, claiming to be targeting Hizbollah assets. Nonetheless, an analyst close to Hizbollah expressed confidence that party followers do not fear a large-scale battle and may, persuaded by tales of horrors in Gaza, pressure party leaders to act more strongly.

Should conflict break out, Hizbollah thinks that acting in the name of supporting the Palestinian cause will increase its popularity among Lebanon's Sunnis. However, it may struggle in that aspect. While certain Lebanese Sunni militant organisations have expressed their willingness to fight with the group, many others recall the brutal Shiite-Sunni street fights in May 2008, which were started by discussion of disarming Hizbollah and stained the Shiite party in their eyes (Rodman, 2023).

EGYPTIANS' POSITION ON THE HAMAS-ISRAELI WAR 2023

Since Israel began bombing Gaza after the Hamas attacks on October 7, Egyptian officials have expressed concerns regarding the potential influx of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip into the Sinai Peninsula via the Rafah crossing, either as a result of fleeing the conflict or being forcibly expelled by Israel (Simon & Stevenson, 2023). These apprehensions have been fueled by several factors, including Israel's implementation of a comprehensive blockade, statements from Israeli officials hinting at population displacement, and directives from Israeli authorities for Palestinians in northern Gaza to relocate to the

southern part of the strip. Cairo's position is influenced by both principled and practical considerations, including the historical context of the 1948 war and the potential implications for regional stability and security in Sinai. Egypt has firmly communicated its reluctance to become a destination for displaced Gazans, citing the challenges it would pose to its infrastructure, resources, and internal stability.

President Abdelfattah al-Sisi emphasised Egypt's steadfast commitment to the Palestinian cause and its refusal to allow its resolution at the expense of Egypt's interests. This stance has garnered support from other Arab nations, Palestinian militant groups, as well as domestic and regional populations. Concerns about security in Sinai, particularly the risk of reigniting jihadist activity and the difficulty of distinguishing militants from civilian refugees, further reinforce Cairo's position. The potential influx of Palestinians into Egypt could exacerbate existing challenges and destabilise the country as a whole.

To mitigate the risk of mass displacement from Gaza, Egypt has advocated for the delivery of humanitarian aid to the strip and opposed an Israeli ground invasion. However, Israeli actions have hindered relief efforts, such as strikes near the Rafah border gate, impeding the passage of aid convoys. Despite some concessions by Israel allowing limited humanitarian supplies into Gaza, concerns persist about the diversion of resources to Hamas's military wing. This situation has strained Gaza's healthcare and humanitarian infrastructure, prompting international calls for increased aid deliveries.

In addition to humanitarian concerns, Egypt has been involved in negotiations over the release of hostages held by Hamas. While rejecting proposals to accept Palestinian refugees in exchange for aid and debt relief, Egypt seeks opportunities to address its economic challenges (Simon & Stevenson, 2023). Efforts by the European Union and Gulf Arab states to support Egypt economically reflect broader concerns about regional stability and migration flows. These financial initiatives could offer much-needed relief to Egypt's economy, albeit with implications for its domestic and regional dynamics.

TURKEY POSITION ON THE HAMAS – ISRAELI WAR 2023

Turkey engaged in vigorous diplomatic efforts immediately following the October 7 attacks, aiming to encourage de-escalation and prevent a broader conflict. Employing measured language, Ankara called on both sides to exercise restraint as Israeli airstrikes devastated parts of Gaza and Hamas continued launching rockets into Israel. Turkish officials also expressed readiness to mediate between the parties to facilitate de-escalation and promote a two-state solution based on 1967 borders, potentially with external actors such as Ankara serving as guarantors. Despite reports suggesting that Turkey requested key Hamas leaders, including chairman Ismail Haniyeh, to leave the country, Ankara denied these claims, likely to avoid criticism from pro-Hamas domestic constituencies (Bishku, 2023).

As Israel's military operation expanded, Turkey grew increasingly critical. Reflecting widespread public sentiment, Turkish officials condemned the campaign as grossly disproportionate and beyond the bounds of a justifiable response to the October 7 attacks. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated on October 26 that “[Israel’s] attacks on Gaza have long exceeded the limits of self-defence and have evolved into blatant cruelty, massacre, and barbarism” (Bishku, 2023, p. 43). He separately defended Hamas fighters for “seeking to defend their territory.” Turkish officials are concerned that Israel’s ground offensive in Gaza will further exacerbate the suffering of innocent civilians and emphasise the urgent need for humanitarian aid deliveries to Gaza. They have raised this issue in Turkey’s diplomatic engagements with relevant parties. Notably, Ankara strongly condemned Israel’s October 30 strike on the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital in Gaza, particularly frustrating Turkish authorities as they had previously shared the facility’s coordinates with Israeli authorities.

The conflict in Gaza has cast a shadow over efforts to improve Turkish-Israeli relations, which were fully restored a year ago after a tumultuous decade. Much of the strain in relations stemmed from the situation in Gaza. Ankara severed ties with Israel in mid-2010 following an Israeli raid on

the Mavi Marmara, a Turkish civilian flotilla carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza, resulting in the deaths of ten Turkish crew members. It took six years to restore ties, only for them to deteriorate again in 2018 after Ankara downgraded relations and expelled the Israeli ambassador following Israeli actions that led to the deaths of 60 Palestinian protesters on the Gaza border. In 2021 and 2022, as part of a shift towards a more pragmatic foreign policy and an attempt to alleviate isolation in the eastern Mediterranean, Turkey once again normalised diplomatic relations with Israel (Erdoğan Şafak, 2024). Among other initiatives, the two countries explored the possibility of constructing a gas pipeline from Israel through Turkey to Europe. However, the fate of this project is now increasingly uncertain. On October 28, Israel recalled its diplomats from Turkey in response to what Foreign Minister Eli Cohen termed “serious statements” criticising Israeli conduct in the war (Erdoğan Şafak, 2024). The conflict in Gaza also introduces uncertainty into Turkey’s efforts to normalise relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Relations were disrupted following the 2011 Arab Spring, during which Ankara supported groups linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, viewed unfavourably by these states. Some pro-government commentators suggest that the war could isolate Israel regionally, potentially facilitating improved relations between Turkey and these countries.

However, Turkey’s relationship with Hamas complicates matters. Unlike the U.S., certain Western states, and Israel, Ankara has never designated Hamas as a terrorist organization. Instead, Turkey has invested considerable effort in attempting (unsuccessfully) to transform Hamas from an “armed resistance” group into a potential partner in a two-state solution, primarily by bolstering its political wing. Members associated with this wing have sought refuge in Turkish cities. Israel has long criticised Turkey for its stance, and during the recent normalisation process between the two countries, Ankara reportedly took measures to restrict some of Hamas’s activities in Turkey. Consequently, many Hamas members, including Ismail Haniyeh, reportedly relocated to

Qatar. The extent of Turkey's influence over Hamas's political arm today is uncertain, but it has likely diminished in recent years as the group's Iran-backed military wing, beyond Turkey's influence, has asserted dominance.

While Ankara's channels to Hamas's political wing may prove beneficial in the future, this history, combined with Erdoğan's unequivocal pro-Palestinian rhetoric, which at times explicitly supports Hamas, limits Ankara's prospects for mediating in the current crisis. The deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations also reduces Ankara's ability to act as an impartial mediator. Instead, Qatar, Turkey's primary partner in the Gulf, has taken a leading role in efforts to secure the release of hostages. Nonetheless, Ankara's links to Hamas's political wing may still prove valuable.

The Gaza conflict also complicates Turkey's relations with the U.S. and EU, which had shown signs of improvement until recently but now face growing strain as long as the conflict persists. Turkey and Western states diverge in their views on Hamas and responses to Israeli military actions. Even in the initial days following Hamas's attacks, when Turkish officials sought to present a balanced perspective on the conflict, Erdoğan and others criticised the U.S. and EU for what they later described as unwavering support for Israel's actions against Hamas. Erdoğan strongly objected to the U.S. deployment of two aircraft carriers to the eastern Mediterranean, questioning its intentions. The attack on Gaza's Al-Ahli hospital on October 17, whose responsibility remains disputed, sparked significant pro-Palestinian protests in Turkey, including at NATO's Kürecik radar base in Malatya, as demonstrators accused Israel of carrying out the strike. As a security measure, the U.S. closed its consulate in Adana, southern Turkey (Fantappie & Nasr, 2024).

As long as the crisis continues, Turkey's leadership will grapple with conflicting pressures: the public's strong support for the Palestinian cause, the country's Western alliances, and Ankara's commitment to an assertive foreign policy that would typically involve playing a prominent role in resolving the conflict.

IRAN POSITION ON THE HAMAS – ISRAELI WAR 2023

Iran's leadership has endeavoured to distance itself from allegations of direct involvement in the 2023, October 7 attack, Hamas attacks, despite its longstanding support for the group and its subsequent commendation of the operation. Since then, Iran has vocally cautioned against the regional consequences of an escalated Israeli campaign in Gaza. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei stated on October 10: "The entire Islamic world is obliged to support the Palestinians, and, God willing, it will support them. But this action was carried out by the Palestinians themselves" (Fantappie & Nasr, 2024, p. 11) For Tehran, the crisis presents strategic opportunities. It is evidently pleased by the criticism of Israeli actions from certain Arab nations considering normalising relations with Israel, its primary adversary in the Middle East. Iran has emphasised the idea that Hamas's attack on October 7 revealed Israel's vulnerabilities and has seized every opportunity to condemn what it alleges is U.S. complicity in exacerbating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, amplifying the reputational damage already suffered by Washington in the region. Groups backed by Iran have escalated attacks on Israel and U.S. forces in the region. However, there are significant risks, including the possibility that Iran's brinkmanship may backfire. Iran-backed groups have intensified attacks on Israel and U.S. forces in Syria and Iraq, with over two dozen incidents since mid-October, breaking a period of relative calm in hostilities between Washington and Tehran. This respite is widely believed to have been part of informal de-escalation agreements between the two adversaries.

Paradoxically, Tehran may view these attacks, coupled with rhetoric from Iranian political and military figures threatening further escalation if Israel continues its current course, as an attempt to manage the risk of conflict. In other words, Iran and its allies may be trying to dissuade Israel and its allies from pursuing a broader campaign in Gaza or Lebanon that could draw in other regional actors, potentially involving Iran to Israel's detriment.

This reflects the longstanding logic of Iran's "forward defence" policy, which aims to exploit vulnerabilities for the U.S. and its Middle Eastern allies to respond if attacked. However, the U.S. and its allies are warning the "axis of resistance" of the dangers of opening multiple fronts, suggesting that operations by this "axis" would face overwhelming U.S. and/or Israeli military force.

Against this backdrop, an Israeli ground incursion into Gaza presents Tehran with a dilemma: if it refrains from intervening to prevent Hamas's destruction, it risks losing credibility with its local allies. However, if it encourages Hezbollah or other regional partners to intervene more forcefully, it might prompt Israel, with U.S. support, to significantly degrade Hezbollah's capabilities. In the former scenario, Iran risks losing face; in the latter, it risks losing a crucial ally in Syria and Lebanon, whose ability to target U.S. and Israeli interests helps protect Tehran from potential action against its advanced nuclear programme. Iran may attempt to navigate this dilemma by encouraging its allies to escalate attacks on Israel and the U.S. in a controlled manner. However, this strategy has its limitations. The U.S. has made it clear that it will respond to attacks against its forces, and Israel is likely to do the same, heightening the risks of escalation, particularly in cases of misjudgment or miscalculation.

For nearly four decades, Iran's forward-defence policy has deterred potential attackers by projecting power through allies across the region. The conflict in Gaza is pushing the boundaries of that policy by potentially involving Tehran directly in the entanglements it has sought to avoid.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, there has been a concerted effort to de-escalate tensions in the Middle East and normalise relations between Israel and several Arab nations. The Abrahamic Accords, particularly significant, facilitated normalisation between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. However, recent events have eroded this progress swiftly, posing a threat to domestic stability in

many Middle Eastern states and revealing enduring challenges in normalisation efforts.

Israel's relations with Egypt and Jordan have faced particular strain. Despite decades of normalised relations, both countries have seen their ties with Israel deteriorate, especially in recent weeks. Jordan's King Abdullah II has denounced Israel's military actions as "war crimes," while Egypt has criticised them as "collective punishment." Meanwhile, Egyptian President El-Sisi harbours concerns about Hamas, a group linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, which he ousted in a military coup ten years ago. Both Egypt and Jordan are wary of the potential influx of refugees and the broader security implications for their nations. Yet, their core concern lies in the growing support for Palestine among their populations, reflecting discontent with their own authoritarian governments. Amid economic crises and internal instability, both nations tread cautiously to avoid fueling domestic unrest by not backing Palestine.

While many Gulf states have criticised Israel's Gaza attacks, their rhetoric has been more subdued than in previous years. The underlying rationale for recent rapprochement remains valid as Middle Eastern nations seek to diversify their economies amid global shifts away from oil and gas. Additionally, they remain deeply concerned about the threat posed by Iran and its proxies.

Nations navigate a delicate balance, each crafting its own narrative. Following Hamas' attack, notable divisions emerged in approaches. While the UAE and Bahrain condemned the October 7th attack, others in the region did not. However, there is a growing consensus among Arab nations, as evidenced by a joint statement from nine foreign ministers condemning civilian targeting and perceived violations of international law in Gaza.

The evolving situation, including the US interception of Iranian-backed Houthi missiles aimed at Israel and Israeli strikes on Syrian airports, underscores ongoing tensions. The greatest concern is Hezbollah's potential involvement, as the Iran-backed militant group signals its readiness to join the conflict. Escalating exchanges between Israel and Hezbollah in

Lebanon heighten the risk of regional spread, despite calls for peace from many nations.

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