

ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR IN GAZA: REARRANGEMENT OF REGIONAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract

The recent Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza and their persistent military campaign against each other, owing to atrocities and mass destruction, have drawn international attention to the regional politics of the Middle East. Recent regional political changes have been disrupted, such as Arab-Israel efforts to normalise relations after the Abraham Accords and the latest Saudi-Israel Peace Deal. The ongoing carnage in Gaza has pivoted Arab states' interests away from the peace processes, thus shifting the regional as well as major powers' alliance priorities. Iran, whose rapprochement with Saudi Arabia has begun, also warned of a pre-emptive attack against Israel should the latter invade Gaza. Most Arab states have shown solidarity with the Palestine cause; on the contrary, significant actors such as the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) have shown their support for Israel, as manifested by the veto of UNSC resolutions. From a structural realist view, as propounded by Kenneth Waltz, international politics can be explained through a system-level analysis. It highlights cause-and-effect relations that can be observed between the states, primary units, and the anarchical international structure. Keeping this in mind, such rearrangement of alliances in the Middle East indicates the prolongation and intensification of war amid anarchy in an emerging multipolar world. Moreover, the war in Gaza holds a high chance of regional spillover. In any case, the war that ignited Israel-Hamas tensions is likely to continue unless prominent actors' mediation brings to light the root cause of the problem, which lies in the illegal occupation of Palestine.

Keywords: Israel, Palestine, Hamas, Military, Alliances, Occupation, Middle East.

Introduction

The Palestine issue has been surfacing for over seven decades, and the recent attacks on Israel by Hamas have renewed the tensions once again. The offensive attacks and the grave atrocities committed against humanity have been a central feature of the war. The recent developments in the conflict include cutting off humanitarian aid to Palestinians and indiscriminate attacks on unarmed children, women, and young. The rise in death toll because of airdropped food and the surge in famine-like conditions have all been the result of the unchecked actions of Israel alone. This has posed severe questions on the credibility of the international

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community, regional and principal actors, and global organisations solely created for peace and security, specifically the United Nations (UN).

The Israel-Hamas war in Gaza has brought into the limelight not only nonstate actors but regional players and major powers such as the US, Russia and China, who have vested interests in Middle Eastern politics. The war has put various Arab states in dilemma, which had embarked on the journey of normalisation with Israel. It has further divided the major powers in two camps: those who support Israeli atrocities and those who condemn Israeli atrocities. The lack of accountability for Israel's atrocities testifies to an anarchic structure, leading to the intensification and prolongation of war. This can be elucidated using the theory of structural realism by Kenneth Waltz.

Theoretical Framework

As propounded by Kenneth Waltz, structural realism is a system-oriented theory that provides a system-level analysis of power politics and the existing reality of conflict resulting from an anarchical international structure. He has elucidated the notion using the metaphor of an oligopolistic market from economics. Within this market, firms cannot settle prices solely through individual internal decision-making or mere negotiations; instead, the market structure sets a precedent for price competition.¹ This depicts how the structure conditions the behaviour of actors or firms. Similarly, the structure of the international system explains the manner or patterns of state behaviour and its conditions. According to this, the global system comprises various characteristics forming the theory's four core assumptions.²

- States as primary units or central actors in international politics.
- States seeking security through self-help, capabilities, and power.
- Rational state behaviour and their transitive preferences.
- Anarchical system and absence of effective central authority.

As embedded in Waltz's Theory of International Politics (1979), structural realism highlights cause-and-effect relations that can be observed between the states and the structure.³ This can be elucidated through the constant struggle for power among states, a product of an anarchical system rather than the state's mechanisation. Self-help is the crucial rule by which states function; hence, the disparate growth rates among them and the competition for enhancing one's capabilities, security, and power maximisation shape international politics, often impacting the structure. Any such unregulated and unsupervised actions by states can improve the probability of an outbreak of war.⁴

An explanation for the causes of war can be provided under this theory, where war becomes an invariable facet of international relations due to its anarchical structure. Two axioms of the theory are directly linked to it. Foremost is related to the capabilities and the distribution of military might that primarily determine the length of the war being conducted for a struggle for domination among great powers.

Secondly, the competitive nature of the self-interested states engaged in a balance of power, thus leading the direction toward war.

Recurrence of war is likely to take place. However, much of it depends upon the polarity of the system. Bipolarity that characterises two great powers is less likely to reignite war as one's loss is gain for the other, thus maintaining a balance of power in a much simpler manner. On the contrary, multipolarity features disperse dangers and covert and often overlapping interests with a valuable state of responsibilities.⁵ Moreover, complex interdependence and complicated alliance politics increase uncertainty and pave the way for miscalculations, increasing the probability of the outbreak of war.⁶

This also highlights how structural realism links with classical realism in terms of the balance of power and formation of alliances but simultaneously diverges due to its deductive nature and inspirations from the economic dimension.

Israel-Hamas War in Gaza (October 2023)

For at least a decade, the Palestinian issue has been in the international media mainly because of the lack of interest of stakeholders and the key parties to arrive at a solution. The recent attacks initiated by Hamas on Israeli civilians and military personnel on 7th October 2023 from the Gaza Strip depict a new confrontation.

Hamas is a Palestinian de facto governing authority that has controlled Gaza since 2006, a disputed land between Palestine and Israel situated on the Mediterranean Sea. However, if viewed as a movement, it can be linked to a more significant cause, such as Palestine nationalism (Arab and Islamic), the elimination of not just Israel but the overall Jewish control of the Palestinian territory, which denotes its geographical, geopolitical, theological and cultural significance, and to fight a holy war.⁷ Therefore, it is an ideologically driven movement shaped by an authority and complemented by a military dimension.

This very ideology has been shaping Israel-Hamas Relations since the beginning. Before Hamas' victory in 2006 and its control over Gaza in 2007, the relations were strained due to the continuous exchange of hostilities. Since the 1990s, Hamas disrupted the Peace Process to undermine negotiations and destroy Israel's sense of security like the Oslo Accord I and II of 1993 and 1995, which were signed two years apart between Israel and PLO to lay the groundwork for the formation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. However, it was never realised.⁸ Throughout the 2000s, Hamas reacted adversely against such attempts at a two-state solution by way of a tragic cycle of suicide bombings, resulting in massive Israeli retaliation and a more direct deterrence relationship with Hamas.⁹ The year 2004 was chaotic as Israelis assassinated Sheikh Ahmed Yasin, the founder and leader of Hamas, further fueling animosities and motivating them to pursue their goals.¹⁰

Since Hamas' takeover of Gaza in 2007, Israel has made attempts to isolate and subsequently destabilise Hamas through economic and military blockade, like in 2008, because it was no longer a militant network but rather a governing authority of a quasi-state. To dismantle Hamas further, it engaged in a series of military attacks on Gaza in 2008-2009, 2012, and 2014.¹¹ Israel's leadership doubled its efforts to resume its aggression, and diplomats still refused to negotiate over Gaza. In contrast, Hamas refused to bow to the international community's demands to recognise Israel and renounce violence.¹² Thus, the lack of positional bargaining led to failed negotiations, short-term ceasefires, and, eventually, disastrous results. Since then, their relationship has revolved around intertwined issues such as nationality, religion, land ownership, and entitlement, resulting in a strong stance from both sides.

Manifesting its goal with the same zeal and zest, Hamas took 250 people hostages in recent attacks in 2023,¹³ and subsequently, for a month, Israel's defence forces (IDF) responded through the ground offensive, initially using phosphorus¹⁴ followed by aerial strikes, and the reactionary attacks altogether have mass murdered civilians and non-civilians, and caused damage to critical infrastructures such as homes, schools, and hospitals in Gaza. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has remained adamant and unequivocal about Israel's two political objectives of destroying the Hamas military and its capabilities and taking back the hostages.¹⁵ The persistent attacks have caused 10,000 deaths among Palestinians, out of which 4000 were children, making Palestine a 'graveyard for children' as the UN has quoted.¹⁶ The sentiment of Israelis is such that they believe Palestinians are killed due to Hamas actions and not due to the targeted killings, which various human rights activists have contested.¹⁷

Key events have outlined the main developments of the war since October 2023. Firstly, Israeli bombardment led to indiscriminate killings and a humanitarian catastrophe in the past month following a warning to 2.3 million Palestinian residents to evacuate the Gaza Strip through the southern part.¹⁸ The case became a humanitarian concern when the masses, primarily children, were denied access to aid provided by Egypt initially until the hostages were returned to Israel.¹⁹ Secondly, Israel struck almost 12000 targets between 7th October and 1st November with 25000 tons of explosives, making it the most intense bombing campaign in recent history.²⁰ The intelligent bombs have directly damaged the infrastructures of healthcare, education, and housing, as well as ambulances.²¹ Thirdly, the blackout remained a feature of Israel's war campaign in Gaza, with civilians staying without communication services and mobile and internet networks for day-long hours with heightened uncertainty and fear.²² Despite efforts, the movement of goods and fuels was restricted, as can be seen from the blockage of 23,000 litres of diesel sent through Egypt, causing the breakdown of various facilities like hospitals, water pumps, bakeries, and sewage systems.²³ Fourthly, Hamas and IDF have been engaged in what has been quoted as 'microelectronic warfare (EW)', where the Israeli EW capabilities were pre-empted by Hamas using underground networking.²⁴ Fifthly, the intense bombing and shelling that targeted hospitals remain a persistent feature. The largest hospital in the Gaza

Strip, Al Shifa, was declared a 'death zone' by the World Health Organization (WHO), leaving several patients and children in critical conditions dead.²⁵

Apart from these developments, Israel has been attacked by the international community for engaging in an inhumane approach used towards journalists and civilians, keeping no distinction between them and the military objects. As of July 16, 2024, CPJ's preliminary investigations showed at least 108 journalists and media workers were among the more than 39,000 killed since the war began, making it the deadliest period for journalists since CPJ began gathering data in 1992.²⁶ This had been done after assuring the journalist of their safety.

Israel's consistent military action due to lack of accountability has worsened the conditions in Gaza. Firstly, it accused The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) of being involved in the 7th October Hamas attacks, leading to the cutting of Western countries' funding amid the humanitarian disaster in Gaza in January 2024.²⁷ Despite no concrete proof provided by Israel, it gained the media's attention. Hence, questions were raised about the agency's impartiality, whose only aim was to provide Palestinians with access to humanitarian aid.

To worsen the condition, it blocked the aid operations for Gaza consistently, creating famine-like conditions. A group's research conducted in March 2024 in Egypt, Jordan, and Israel concluded that due to inadequate food, water, medicines, and shelter, famine has spread, thus creating apocalyptic conditions.²⁸ The US, along with Jordan, has been attempting to provide airdropped food to Gaza since the Israeli forces assaulted those reaching the aid trucks on the ground.²⁹ Israel has been consistently indulging in offensive military attacks, inhumane treatment, and indiscriminate killing of unarmed Palestinians, including vulnerable groups like injured women, children, and old, who come to collect aid.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) released a report in May 2024 that reflected the grim situation of Gaza's civilian population and, most prominently, the humanitarian impact of the war. Apart from causing casualties and inflicting injuries to almost 39,000 and 89,000 people, respectively,³⁰ it internally displaced nearly 75% of Gaza, equivalent to approximately 1.7 million people besides more than 10000 missing.³¹ Astonishingly, an average Gazan occupies 1 square meter of space in an IDP shelter, mostly unventilated and affected by rain. Moreover, 1.1 million people face catastrophic levels of food insecurity, and only two out of three water pipelines coming from Israel are operational and restrictively provide access to only unclean water.³² Israel, as an occupying power, has failed to provide the welfare of the occupied population and look at the humanitarian needs.

The blockage of aid by Israel has also led to the conclusion that starvation has been used as a weapon of war. Despite ICJ orders, Israel blocks essential humanitarian assistance, and thus, as per the Human Rights Watch Director, the civilians are at greater risk of dying.³³ Similarly, the health infrastructures stand in looming conditions, as per UNRWA, and have a high chance of spreading severe infectious

diseases. WHO has already reported such cases in April.³⁴ Current Operations in Rafah have resulted in further civilian casualties and displacements, along with the destruction of homes and civilian infrastructure, holding thousands of people at imminent risk of death.³⁵ Therefore, Gazans not only face food and health insecurity but also lack physical protection.

Consequently, people all over the world have taken to the streets in rage, and global leaders have been of the same views, calling for a ceasefire and protection of civilians. Irrespective of the humanitarian concerns, the politics of the war has divided major powers into two camps. One that supports Israel, including the US, the UK, and their allies, such as Italy, Germany, and France, while the rest are against Israel's actions, namely Russia and China. The Arab-Israel relations that were expected to be normalised before the 7th October incident have been jeopardised.³⁶ It has not only rearranged the regional alliances of the broader Middle East but also drawn in the world powers.

China has been diplomatically dealing with the issue of Israel and Palestine and is determined to resolve the problem just as it brokered a deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2023, thus improving its position against the US in the region.³⁷ The US also initially tried to play a diplomatic role by visiting Arab countries, but to no avail.³⁸ Until March 2024, US representatives have made six trips to the Middle East to pursue talks on arrangements of security, governance, and redevelopment of post-conflict Gaza.³⁹ Other than for major powers, the war has created a distinct stance of Arab states like Iran, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia towards Israel. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of the current international structure in the context of the Israel-Hamas war will explain the alliance formation and the prolongation of the war.

Analysing the Rearrangement of Regional Powers through the Lens of Structural Realism

The Israel-Hamas war has not only risked regional conflagration but also affected the major powers' standing in regional politics. To understand the war all around, it is deemed pertinent to dissect the issue that has its roots in the illegal occupation of Palestine by Israel. The Palestine issue has been ongoing for seven decades and is central to Middle East politics. Palestine is divided into two territories, namely the West Bank and Gaza, administratively or nominally run by Palestine Authorities dominated by Fatah and Hamas, respectively, and otherwise under illegal Israeli occupation.⁴⁰ The Palestinian Authority has been internationally recognised, while Hamas has openly refused to recognise Israel on charges of being Western-influenced and corrupt.⁴¹

This has been explained by the Former Information Minister for the Palestine government, Mustafa Bugti, in his interview on CNN with Fareed Zakaria, further linking it as the immediate reason behind the 7th October war. He stated that the political objectives expressed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in his

September UN speech were considered provocative. Netanyahu declared to liquidate Palestinian rights and cause by normalising relations with Arab Partners like Saudi Arabia.⁴² He further went to the UN carrying a map of Israel, which displayed the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem, and Golan Heights as its occupied territory.⁴³ Such declaration of annexation of occupied territories caused resistance among Palestinians. The following sections explain Israel's power and security maximisation efforts, the complex alliancing of regional and prominent actors and their impacts on war, and a possible regional spillover.

Israel: Security Maximization and Pursuance of Political Objectives

Geography and territory serve as a long-term power base for a state,⁴⁴ and this has been the case with Israel, which has been engaged in the war for sovereignty, land occupation, and, subsequently, power maximisation. Moreover, the primary goal of Israel to militarily compete against Hamas can only be achieved through its military capability maximisation, hence, better means of attempting to maximise power. Mearsheimer asserts that a country trying to maximise its power competes in the offensive capabilities.⁴⁵ Just like the states aim to maximise their relative power position, Israel enhances and strengthens its military to gain a relative position or advantage over the other to make itself more secure and maintain the means for its self-defence. Therefore, brutal killings against Hamas and the aim to dismantle its military and economic administration from its roots have shaped the irrational behaviour of Israel.⁴⁶ The Hamas dismantling would act as a means of achieving the end goal of security.

Israel's stated political objective has led it to enhance its military might and electronic warfare capability against Hamas, especially with the help of the US. Though Israel already has one of the world's strongest militaries as it receives US\$3.8 billion of aid from the US yearly, the US has continued sending its guided missile carriers and F-35 fighters along with other military equipment throughout the Israel war in Gaza.⁴⁷ Moreover, Israel's iron dome system, an air defence system designed to destroy short-range rockets using radar, has fired 8000 rockets since 7th October within a month.⁴⁸ Israel has been indulged in expansive military operations in Gaza using these. The operations initially targeted Hamas tunnels known as Gaza Metro and other military infrastructures. The sophisticated tunnels under the Gaza Strip and parts of Israel and Egypt have been designed for covert operations, making it easier to conduct surprise attacks and challenging for the IDF to identify them. Hamas' military wing, Qassam Brigade, which has up to 50,000 troops and possesses a large inventory of guns, grenades, and rockets,⁴⁹ has claimed to have attacked 120 Israeli military vehicles as of November 11, 2023.⁵⁰ It is also equipped with anti-tank guided missiles and MANPADS, known as shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles, making it the best-equipped guerilla army.⁵¹

In the north of Israel lies Lebanon, which inhabits Hezbollah, an internationally recognised terrorist group that shares a common enemy with Hamas.

Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed Islamic militant organisation as well as a Lebanon political party, has become an essential threat to Israel as Israel's ground operations expand. In March 2024, it fired dozens of rockets into the northern part of Israel following its strike in southern Lebanon.⁵² With Hamas as its ally, it has been adamant about initiating an entire regional war with its missiles, drones, and other arsenals set. Hamas and Hezbollah, both backed by Iran, have made the state a key player in the war as well. Iran has extended its support for Hamas and Hezbollah with the production and proliferation of advanced weapon systems such as cruise missiles, unmanned aerial systems, ballistic missiles, etc. Iran's support to the other proxy groups like the Fatemiyoun Brigade in Syria, the Badr organisation in Iraq, and Houthi rebels in Yemen have escalated the chances of war expansion.⁵³ Houthi rebels have launched drone and missile attacks on Israel since 7th October, while the US coalition troops have faced intensive attacks in Iraq and Syria by the Iran-backed groups.⁵⁴ Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad has furthermore criticised normalisation agreements between Middle Eastern countries and Israel.⁵⁵ The regional rivals of Israel and the US have created more of an Arab front, due to which Israel has been determined to enhance its military might.

Rearrangement of Regional Powers Viz a Viz Israel-Hamas War

The Arab allying against Israel has questioned the position of Arab-Israel normalisation and peace deals of the past. For instance, the Abraham Accord signed with the effort of the US in 2020 between Israel, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Morocco, and Sudan, which opened defence and security cooperation opportunities, has been hindered due to the complex situation in the region.⁵⁶ In November 2023, Bahrain recalled its ambassadors to Israel and halted the economic ties. However, the UAE, which has defence and financial relations, has been silent on Israel's action in Gaza.⁵⁷

Similar is the dilemma with Saudi Arabia, which had normalised ties with Israel, with US efforts continuing to do so despite Israel's war in Gaza. The normalisation of the two was part of the US national security interest. Saudi Arabia has asked for a US defence pact that would allow few restrictions on US arms sales and assist Saudi in civilian nuclear programme in exchange for a concession for Palestine state, which would mean the creation of it.⁵⁸ The Israel-Hamas war has two immediate impacts on Saudi Arabia. Firstly, it occurred amid the Israel-Saudia normalisation agreement when the US diligently worked for it. The reports say that Saudia has frozen the talks. It highlights the significance of the Palestine Question in the quest for normalisation.⁵⁹ The second dilemma for Saudi Arabia is that its closeness to Israel directly affects Saudia-Iran relations, which were sought after reaching a rapprochement after years.

Saudi-Iran relations have been strained due to regional competition for dominance, power, and ideological differences.⁶⁰ The two had cut off their diplomatic ties in 2006; however, due to China's mediation, they signed a deal that embarked

them on a journey of rapprochement in April 2023.⁶¹ The deal affirmed that the two would respect each other's sovereignty and not interfere in internal affairs. About the Israel war in Gaza, the two leaders, namely Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, discussed the need to end war crimes over a phone call on 10th October, cementing their diplomatic relations.⁶² Subsequently, similar concerns were exchanged at a summit in Riyadh on 11th November 2023.⁶³ Therefore, Saudi Arabia had to put a halt to its close ties with Israel to balance its relationship with Iran.

Among regional actors that condemned Israel and formed alliances with Arab states were Egypt and Jordan. Jordan recalled its ambassador from Israel and vocally protested Israel's actions, while Egyptian support for Palestinians has been consistent. It has provided humanitarian aid to the Gaza residents fleeing the Rafah crossing and openly condemned Israel but not Hamas.⁶⁴ Moreover, Turkey, a key player in the Middle East, normalised relations with Israel in 2022 in the economic, trade and cultural spheres.⁶⁵ However, these were jeopardised due to the Gaza war as Turkey's Tayyip Erdogan openly criticised Western supporters of Israel and made statements in defence of Hamas, calling it a liberation group rather than a terrorist organisation.⁶⁶ Despite this stance, Turkey halted the negotiations with Hamas after offending Israel during its time of need, and based on such analysis, experts describe Tayyip Erdogan as a pragmatist aiming for a future relationship with Israel beyond Netanyahu's tenure while criticising him publicly.⁶⁷ Such actions indicate Turkey's neutrality.

These two vital neighbours of Israel and Palestine are deemed essential to mention. The deterioration in Israel's relationship with Egypt and Jordan impacts regional stability. The relations held prospects for ending the war by playing the role of releasing hostages and prisoners of war, as Egypt had done before. However, the lack of cooperation can impact the prolongation of the war.⁶⁸

The Israel-Hamas war has not only jeopardised regional conflagration but also impacted the major powers' involvement in the region. As discussed, structural realists believe that bipolarity is more stable than multipolarity because it consists of fewer actors with evenly matched capabilities, thus minimising the likelihood of war. Such has been a dilemma with the major powers, namely the US, UK, Russia, and China, in an emerging multipolarity.⁶⁹

The US has been an indispensable key partner for Israel throughout Israel's war against Hamas, extending political and military support. The US and UK, along with allies, namely France, Germany, and Italy, also released a joint statement declaring united support for Israel and condemning Hamas. The UK also pledged diplomatic, intelligence, and security support to Israel when needed.⁷⁰ On the contrary, Russia and China's vested interests in the region and on the global stage have a massive role in prolonging the conflict.⁷¹ Russia has seen the Israel-Hamas war in its favour as it has distracted the US from the Russian war in Ukraine⁷² and involvement in Syria.⁷³ China has been vocal about Palestinian casualties. China, like Russia, also benefits from US distraction from the possible US-China clashes over Taiwan. For

China, the war will not only exhaust the US economically but distort its image as a peacemaker, presenting China as an alternative for developing countries.⁷⁴

The regional and major powers have overlapping interests. However, different motivations behind backing Israel or Hamas have divided them into two camps: those siding with either of the war parties. Such complex relationships, as found in structural realism, depict an interdependent and emerging multipolar world causing instability and an imbalance of powers, thus intensifying the war.

Intensification and Prolongation of War

The role of major powers, their complex alliancing, and their impact on UN resolutions have highlighted the anarchical structure of the world. The UNSC called for a ceasefire and urgent humanitarian pauses to allow access to aid only six weeks after the outbreak of war. Unfortunately, four resolutions have been passed, and all have been vetoed by the major powers, namely the US, the UK, and at times, France and Italy, on the pretext that the resolutions didn't condemn or criticise Hamas specifically.

The draft resolution of 15 November 2023 calling for humanitarian pauses and corridors in Gaza was approved by 15 member bodies but abstained by the US, UK, and Russia. Russia also abstained from voting because the ceasefire was not mentioned. The ineffectiveness of the UNSC in holding Israel accountable can be accredited to the major power politics that have a vested interest in regional politics. Therefore, it paints a picture of the anarchical structure of the world and conditions the states' behaviours.

Subsequently, a Qatar-mediated truce reached on 23rd of November 2023 resulted in an agreement for a humanitarian pause of four days between Israel and Hamas, which included the release of hostages (including women and children) in Gaza in exchange for hostages kept in Israeli prisons.⁷⁵ However, the prospects seemed bleak and unsustainable because the Israeli Prime Minister declared the truce to be temporary and that the war would continue with full force afterwards.⁷⁶

Hence, UN resolutions that immediately called for ceasefires were vetoed by the US and UK for their support of Israel, and the same stance echoes in 2024, where their positions have not changed even slightly. As of February 2024, the US vetoed, the UK abstained, and Russia and China voted in favour of the ceasefire, while in March 2024, the US circulated its own UNSC resolution draft, which called for an immediate ceasefire for the sake of the protection of civilians but tied to the release of hostages.⁷⁷ Such ambiguity in the statement and actions of the US raises doubts about the political and diplomatic standing of the US in the Israel-Hamas war, which has witnessed grave humanitarian violations.

The regional and prominent actors have repeatedly attempted to mediate and halt the development of war. However, they have failed to achieve peace through diplomacy. It is deemed pertinent to mention Johan Galtung, a pioneer of peace

research, and his insights on the solutions to the Israel-Palestine Issue. He was convinced that the events leading to the partition of Israel and Palestine into two states in 1947 and the further creation of Jewish and Arab states have been the biggest mistakes of recent history.⁷⁸ While discussing Israel's past actions, he opined that security can be attained through peace. However, peace can never be attained through security.⁷⁹ He offered a consensual multilateral solution to the problem where Middle East community could be formed that would include Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Egypt. Hence, these culturally linked states should find symmetry and balance in economic and military terms to live peacefully, for violence is not an option, and the policy of occupation will yield fewer results in the future.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, anarchy, due to current regional and significant power politics and temporary solutions inspired by their self-interest motives, can be accredited for prolonging the war. As propounded by structural realists, this also identifies the cause-and-effect relationship between the state and the structure that moves to and from it.

Regional Implications of the Israel-Hamas War and Possible Solutions

The state of anarchy considerably defines the outlines of this war. The war is poised to widen due to Israel's ever-growing insecurity and its subsequent attempts to eradicate Hamas from Gaza. One of the alarming yet significant implications is the possibility of widening the conflict. It can take a dimension of direct war leading to a confrontation between Iran and Israel, as has been witnessed by the unprecedented strikes by Iran and Israel on one another's territories.⁸¹ There is still a growing concern that Israel and Hezbollah may engage in a major war. Few rationales may help explain this future development.

Eliot A. Cohen, an American political scientist, writes that there is a considerable danger of the spillover of war for a few reasons. Iran has found an opportunity in war to encircle and weaken Israel by building a ring of enemies, namely Hamas (which it extends support through arms), Hezbollah in Lebanon (better equipped than Hamas), Shiite Militias in Syria (who have geographical proximity with Golan Heights) and Houthis in Yemen. These, together with the support and direction of Iran, hold great potential to weaken, if not destroy, Israel and its series of operations.⁸² For Netanyahu, his political legitimacy has been jeopardised since the beginning of the war as it proved to be a blow to his ability to guarantee Israel's security; thus, as per some observers, it has become incumbent upon him to continue the war with Iran to save his face and ensure his political survival.⁸³ Therefore, the confrontations may increase the tensions to the extent that the experts are apprehensive of Israel's direct strike on Iran's nuclear facilities to curb its nuclear programme.⁸⁴ Fareed Zakaria pointed out that Israel's military operation in the northern region has intensified to enable the return of 80,000 Israelis who had fled. However, this could lead to an increase in targeting of Hezbollah, which may prompt a more robust response from the group and widen the conflict.⁸⁵

The US may face consequences for deploying troops in the Middle East and shipping in the seas. Its forces were targeted 13 times by drones of Iranian proxies in October 2023.⁸⁶ The number may increase since militias have grown in number, especially Hezbollah, which is counted as the most heavily armed non-state actor. Moreover, there had been incidents where Houthi attacked Red Sea Shipping, which invited US response. There may come a time when the US attacks not only Hezbollah but Iran's advisers and logistics. Hezbollah may engage in coordinated attacks with Hamas, or the US may strike against Irani targets in Yemen, therefore widening the conflict.⁸⁷ All these may occur due to the increased involvement of state and non-state actors in the conflict, making the conflict wider than ever.

This widening of it will have significant economic repercussions for regional and prominent actors in the future. As witnessed by the Houthi rebel attacks on the Red Sea, a waterway that carries 30% of international container traffic, major companies abandoned the routes and redirected towards longer sails around Africa. This showed the potential of rebel groups, especially those equipped with new weapons, to unequivocally disrupt global trade and commerce and threaten freedom of navigation. Since this has become the new normal, the future and long-term economic repercussions may be far greater than what is witnessed as immediate consequences for global commerce and regional instability.⁸⁸ It has already subjugated the financial interests of states with direct and indirect threats. This was evident from the persistent risks to Indian trade and workers in Israel from threats like Houthis and piracy.⁸⁹ Similarly, the economies of Egypt, Israel, and Jordan have faced downfall due to such incidents.

The prolongation of war may exacerbate the economic conditions for the region and the globe. The statistics say that Israel and the wider region are moving towards more financially constrained and challenging times because of conflict. This had been evident from the IMF growth forecasts for the Middle East this year, which were lowered by 0.5% to 2%, which is remarkably lower than 5.6% in 2022.⁹⁰ The probability of economic repercussions may also worsen the expense of fuel, oil, higher inflation rates, etc. It has been noted by Indermit Gill, the World Bank's chief economist for development economics, that even though the world is in a better position to deal with the major oil price shock, the Middle East conflict could still push the global commodity markets into uncharted waters.⁹¹

The widening of conflict and its economic repercussions may persist due to the deadlock, leading to the prolongation of war in the future. It mainly depends upon how far the adamant behaviour and stated political objective of Israel to eliminate Hamas goes and to what extent the Western powers will support it despite the high casualties. It is poised to remain deadlocked for various reasons. Hamas appears to want to pursue its objectives, continue the war regardless of its consequences, despite a decline in its popularity among Gazans, and refuses to allow international forces to enter the Gaza Strip. This is evident from Hamas' persistent effort to prevent Palestinian authority's return, refusing concessions to Israel concerning the hostages,

rejecting temporary ceasefire proposals, and insisting on the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.⁹² Like previous attempts, the critical leadership gathered in Egypt in May for ceasefire proposals and to pause Israel's offensive, but to no avail. Instead, Israel's forces moved into the southern Gaza city of Rafah while cutting off aid routes and the only exit for wounded patients.⁹³

One of the immediate impacts of the prolongation of Israel's ground offensive and the expansion of operations in southern Gaza is a significant displacement or Nakba. The Nakba, or catastrophe that marked the considerable displacement of Palestinians in 1948, can be revived with even greater intensity in 2024 if the war developments are not put to a halt. The masses will have to move to refugee camps as permanently displaced in Egypt, as has been the case at Rafah crossing and Sinai.⁹⁴ Moreover, Khaled Elgindy, an expert on Israel-Palestine affairs, states that the war has exceeded expectations in terms of scale, intensity, and duration. And since it is entirely separate from reality, it will create something much worse than the future, i.e., the future generation may have a negative view of Israel and the US when they grow up.⁹⁵ Hence, in achieving its politically unrealistic war objectives, Israel is creating a more dangerous environment for itself and the future of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Looking at the current positions and interests of Israel and Hamas and the failed attempts of external actors, there appears to be a stalemate, and the future of negotiations seems grim.

Looking at the bleak future developments, there is a dire need to find viable immediate and long-term solutions to the conflict. It is deemed pertinent to prioritise humanitarian aid and the needs of hostages first. Gradually move towards a resolution that may include the ceasefire and addressing the root causes, i.e., the illegal occupation of Palestine.

Firstly, alleviation of the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza requires a free, uninterrupted flow of humanitarian aid that otherwise has been obstructed by Israel due to its security illusions. Aid distribution among vulnerable groups amidst no law-and-order situations must be assigned to a neutral and responsible third party. Since Israel has acted the opposite, the Palestinians may ensure it. However, it lacks the motive to do so.⁹⁶ The peacekeeping force would also not serve the purpose during the ongoing war. Therefore, it had been by Israeli defence officials proposed that a mixture of non-Hamas Gazan leaders, with some former Palestinian authority security officers with the aid of Egypt, Jordan, UAE, and any Arab governments which might be feasible and serve as a temporary solution to elevate the exacerbating humanitarian conditions.⁹⁷ However, it would still require Hamas' change in position to allow this strategy to work.

The second most concerning issue is the protection of the lives and human dignity of those caught during the hostilities. Third-party intervention can play a significant role in ensuring adherence to international humanitarian law in humanitarian arenas. One could be the ICRC, which may act as a neutral intermediary to oversee the conditions, especially among hostages. Recently, it urged the parties to

allow its team to visit the Palestinians living in Israeli detention and the hostages held by Hamas to ensure their humane treatment and assess their unmet needs.⁹⁸

For long-term peace, the international community's call for an immediate ceasefire seems impractical as it fails to opt for an alternative approach to change Israel and Hamas' motives and actions in Gaza. It has been noticed that diplomatic isolation or economic threats to Israel have been ineffective in compelling it to reach a compromise with Hamas due to its heightened insecurity and core security interests. The probability of an Arab oil embargo like that of 1973 is unlikely due to Arabs' diplomatic standing towards the West.⁹⁹ Moreover, Israel would be unwilling to release Hamas hostages as it has some alleged masterminds who, as per Israel, might threaten with a strong force in the long run. Therefore, Israel will persist in responding to the ceasefire by dismantling Hamas by way of the blockade in Gaza.

The two-state solution also remains at a standstill. Israelis oppose peaceful coexistence and reject a state led by terrorists, while Hamas now enjoys majority support, as nine in ten Palestinians do not trust the Palestinian Authority.¹⁰⁰ The creation of another state appears difficult since Israel's system is intertwined with Palestine, like the economy. Moreover, the Palestinians would not allow the demilitarized state or share space with Jewish settlers, and even if pressured into it, the peace might not be long-term. Issues like borders, water rights, demilitarisation of Palestine state, and partition of Jerusalem would be at the apex.¹⁰¹ Therefore, it has been assessed by various experts that the international community would have to opt for alternate strategies while keeping in view Israel's security concerns and Palestinian grievances to ensure a long-term solution.

This might entail exerting more pressure on the parties, especially Israel, to put a halt to its military advancements. Heed can be taken from the recent European Union foreign affairs ministers' meetings hinting at enforcing stronger economic sanctions on Israel to put a halt to its grave human rights abuses and to strengthen the implementation of the ICJ decision further.¹⁰² Moreover, the odds of attaining Palestine liberation seem high with Arab unity, as reflected by the Arab League's Bahrain declaration that had set a precedent for creating an independent, viable and sovereign state of Palestine.¹⁰³ The spirit was shared by Norway, Ireland, and Spain, who formally recognised Palestine, along with other European countries, while Malta, Slovenia, and Belgium were on their way to following suit.¹⁰⁴ For a long-term solution, Muslim unity may confront the central power politics and Israel's actions towards Palestine by bolstering political will and economic standing through leveraging platforms like OIC.¹⁰⁵ This unity at both regional and international levels offers promising prospects for influencing the decisions of major powers, like the US, that have been backing Israel.

Regardless of the situation, it is unlikely that any alternative plans aimed at achieving immediate or long-term solutions will be successful immediately due to the rigid positions of both Israel and Hamas. Thus, the international community must opt

for such a robust alternative approach to help bring about a resolution between the conflicting parties.

Conclusion

The Israel-Hamas war has garnered the attention of various regional actors, while some significant actors have refrained from voicing their stance. The direct military attacks between Israel and Hamas have intensified regional politics, subsequently drawing the interest of Arab states and the global powers. The Arab states that had been making peace deals with Israel as part of normalisation or reconciliation are found to be in a dilemma of choosing sides. Similarly, the global powers have vested interests that have led them to take sides and influence the decisions at the international level, such as through UNSC resolutions voting procedure. The current war can be quoted as the result of the anarchical structure that has been driving the behaviour of states. Structural realism helps explain the alliancing of the regional and global actors in an emerging multipolar world and dissects the dynamics of war intensity and duration.

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