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Issue Brief

Israel-Hamas War: One Year On

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S*ummary*

As the Israel–Hammas war enters its second year, the situation in the region remains tense and unpredictable amid the calls for de-escalation from the international community. The worsening situation in Gaza, coupled with the escalation on the Lebanese front and persisting tensions in the Red Sea, raises serious concerns about regional security and stability.

In response to the 7 October 2023 Hamas terrorist attack, Israel declared war on Hamas with three primary objectives: to eliminate Hamas, secure the release of hostages and neutralise any future threats from Gaza. After one year of the war, Gaza has witnessed huge devastation. The war is expanding to new frontiers such as the Red Sea and Lebanon with the involvement of the Houthis and Hezbollah, respectively. As a result, the sensitive regional politics and security in West Asia have become further precarious.

The conflict has left large parts of Gaza devastated by Israeli strikes. The human toll is staggering, with over 41,000 deaths and more than 95,000 injuries in Gaza since the war began. In the West Bank, over 10,700 Palestinians have been detained by Israeli forces since the beginning of the war.

Militarily, after one year of fighting, Israel has inflicted severe damage on Hamas. Israel has not only killed thousands of Hamas terrorists, but it has also uncovered a huge network of underground tunnels across Gaza used by the group for military operations and as hideouts. These tunnels, some of which connected Gaza to Egypt, have been largely destroyed, representing a major setback for Hamas. Despite continuing to resist, Hamas has lost much of its manpower, weapons and infrastructure.

Hamas is now demanding a ceasefire and the release of its cadres in Israeli prisons in exchange for the release of around 101 Israeli hostages still in its custody along with other conditions. Mediation efforts by the US, Egypt and Qatar have not yielded any positive results. Meanwhile, in July 2024, Israel’s parliament passed a resolution that opposes the establishment of a Palestinian state as it “will pose an existential danger to the State of Israel and its citizens, perpetuate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and destabilise the region”.¹ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu mentioned in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly on 27 September that his country wants a “de-militarised and de-radicalised Gaza”.² He also asserted that Israel will keep fighting until all the Israeli hostages are released by Hamas.

New Fronts: Red Sea and Lebanon

As Israel started its war against Hamas in Gaza, within no time, two other fronts have emerged which have far-reaching implications for the countries in West Asia and beyond. The Houthis of Yemen declared their support for Hamas against Israel. They started attacking ships linked to Israel passing through the Red Sea as part of their war against Israel. Subsequently, the Houthis targeted the vessels belonging to other countries as well, thereby creating a major tension in the waters of the Red Sea and

¹ [“Knesset Votes Overwhelmingly Against Palestinian Statehood, Days Before PM’s US Trip”](#), *The Times of Israel*, 18 July 2024.

² [“Full Text of Netanyahu’s UN Speech: ‘Enough is Enough,’ He Says of Hezbollah, Also Warns Iran”](#), *The Times of Israel*, 27 September 2024.

forcing the ships from Asia to Europe to take the longer route via the Cape of Good Hope. The participation of the Houthis in the war was the most unexpected element for Israel. Houthis have been attacking Israel by launching missiles and drones, some of which have hit the southern Israeli port city of Eilat. As a result of the Houthis attacks, the Eilat port, which managed around 8 per cent of Israel’s trade, had to stop operations in November 2023.

In a major retaliatory attack against the Houthis, Israel targeted an oil installation in Hodeida in Yemen. Again, in September 2024, Houthis were successful in hitting central Israel with missiles, though no loss of life has been reported in this case. Located far away from Israel, the Houthis have been able to inflict substantial damage on the country by getting themselves unilaterally involved in the war. Israel undertook another major attack on 29 September on Hodeida port and Ras Isa as well.

Besides, the tension in the north along the border with Lebanon has also intensified in recent months. As a result of continuous bombardment by Hezbollah, more than 60,000 Israelis living in the north of the country, have been displaced. Facing continuous attacks from Hezbollah, the Israeli government has now further expanded the objective of the war, which includes bringing the displaced population in the north back to their homes.³

On 17 September, more than 2,750 communication devices (Pagers) used by Hezbollah exploded across Lebanon. Hezbollah accused Israel of sabotaging its communication network system. Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Murtaza Amani was injured in the pager blast. Syrian media also reported that hundreds of Hezbollah cadres were injured in Syria as a result of pager explosions. On the next day, on 18 September, radio devices and mobile electronic communication devices exploded in various parts of Lebanon injuring hundreds of Hezbollah cadres. As per the Lebanese government, 37 people were killed and 2,931 others were injured in both attacks.⁴ Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah, in an address, stated that Israel has “crossed all the red lines” by detonating the communication devices.⁵ Israel, on its part has also continued attacks on targets in Lebanon and killed Nasrallah in a major airstrike on 27 September in Beirut.

Israel has alleged that Hezbollah has violated the UNSC Resolution 1701 of 2006 which created a buffer zone free of “any armed personnel” between the Blue Line in southern

³ [“The Return of Evacuated Residents to Northern Israel is Now a War Goal, PMO Says”](#), *Jerusalem Post*, 17 September 2024.

⁴ [“37 Killed in Two Days of Lebanon Exploding Devices: New Toll”](#), *National News Agency Lebanon*, 19 September 2024.

⁵ [“Sayyed Nasrallah: Difficult Reckoning Awaits ‘Israel’, Hezbollah Won’t Stop pro-Gaza Front”](#), *National News Agency Lebanon*, 19 September 2024.

Lebanon and the Litani River.⁶ As the situation continues to escalate, a number of European, Asian and Arab countries along with the US and Canada issued a joint statement urging for a 21-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon to create room for diplomatic efforts to enable the return of civilians on both sides of the border.⁷

Mediation Efforts

The US, Egypt and Qatar have been mediating in the conflict. The key issues in the mediation efforts are to achieve a permanent ceasefire, withdrawal of the Israeli military from Gaza, return of the displaced people to their homes and the release of the Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners. Several meetings have been held between the mediators and parties involved to stop the war.

Hamas has demanded a complete ceasefire and a guarantee that Israel will not resume fighting after the return of the hostages. Israel, on the other hand, demands the unconditional return of all the hostages for any ceasefire to take place. Hamas has been bargaining hard to get its cadres released in exchange for the Israeli hostages under its captivity. Israel is concerned that the release of the hardened Hamas terrorists from prisons would provide strength to the organisation. Israel's core objective of dismantling Hamas does not converge with the Hamas demands of a prisoner exchange.

Israel has, on the other hand, demands immediate and unconditional release of the hostages in Hamas captivity. It also wants to ensure that no terrorist threat emerges from Gaza for Israel in the future. Hence, it is necessary to destroy the terror infrastructure and eliminate all the Hamas terrorists. Israel has insisted on four non-negotiable conditions in any ceasefire agreement with Hamas.⁸ First, the agreement must allow Israel to resume military action until its objectives are achieved. Second, Israel wants to ensure that there is no smuggling of weapons to Hamas from the Gaza–Egypt border. Third, it must prevent the return of armed Hamas terrorists to the northern Gaza Strip. Finally, Israel aims to ensure the maximum possible return of living hostages held by Hamas. These conditions reflect Israel's primary approach in the war: to secure the release of hostages and to prevent further threats from Hamas.

After consultations with Israel and Hamas, a three-phase ceasefire proposal was made by the US, Egypt and Qatar on 31 May. The same was adopted by the UN Security

⁶ [“Security Council Calls for End to Hostilities Between Hizbollah, Israel, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1701 \(2006\)”](#), United Nations, 11 August 2006.

⁷ [“Joint Statement by the European Union, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States”](#), European Commission, 26 September 2024.

⁸ [“Netanyahu Issues List of 4 ‘Nonnegotiable’ Demands as Hostage Talks Slated to Restart”](#), *The Times of Israel*, 7 July 2024.

Council on 10 June 2024 as Resolution 2735. It proposed that in the first phase, there would be a complete ceasefire in Gaza, women, elderly and wounded Israeli hostages to be released and unspecified number of Palestinian prisoners would be released by Israel.⁹ It also mentioned that the Israeli forces would withdraw from the populated areas in Gaza and Palestinian civilians would return to their homes. In the second phase, there would be a permanent end to the war and the rest of the Israeli hostages under Hamas captivity will be released and there will be full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Phase three suggested a reconstruction plan for Gaza.¹⁰ The UNSC resolution mentioned that Israel agrees to the conditions of the three-phase proposal. After further discussions with Israel and Hamas, on 16 August, the mediating trio of the US, Egypt and Qatar made a ‘Bridging Proposal’ which intends to bridge the gaps in the proposal. Hamas has rejected the proposal accusing the US of ‘buying time for Israel’.¹¹

The finding of the underground tunnels along the Gaza–Egypt border is a huge security concern for Israel. For its future security purposes, Israel wants to maintain its military presence along the Gaza–Egypt border, known as the Philadelphi Corridor, to prevent smuggling of weapons from Egypt for Hamas and to ensure the regrouping of Hamas in the aftermath of Israeli military withdrawal from Gaza. For Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli military control over all the border crossings is important for security and strategic reasons. Hamas has expressed its objection to the presence of the Israeli military along the corridor after the war and wants the complete withdrawal of the Israeli military from Gaza. Egypt has also expressed its concerns about this plan. This condition of Israeli military presence in the Philadelphia Corridor was not mentioned in the May 2024 proposal which has served as a basis for the subsequent negotiations.¹² This has emerged as the most important sticking point in the negotiations between Israel and Hamas.

The return of the Gazans to their homes has been a critical issue. While Hamas has demanded that they be allowed to return to their homes, Israel is hesitant to allow all of them to return without screening them. Israel, therefore, wants to establish another corridor in northern Gaza known as the Netzarim Corridor which will serve as a checkpoint to verify the identity of the Gazans who will be returning to their homes. This remains yet another issue of disagreement between the two sides in the negotiations.

⁹ [“Resolution 2735 \(2024\), Adopted by the Security Council at its 9650th meeting”](#), UN Security Council, 10 June 2024.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ [“Hamas Accuses US of ‘Buying Time for Israel’ in Gaza Ceasefire Talks”](#), *Al Jazeera*, 20 August 2024.

¹² [“Full Text of Israeli Hostage Release-Ceasefire Proposal, Submitted on May 27”](#), *The Times of Israel*, 14 July 2024.

International Response

Though there have been condemnations of the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October and the subsequent devastation in Gaza as a result of the Israeli attack, the international response to the War has significantly varied.

The Arab and Islamic world have unitedly condemned the Israeli war on Gaza as a ‘genocide’¹³ and have appealed for an immediate ceasefire. The joint Arab–Islamic delegation has visited a number of countries and appealed for support for the Palestinian cause. Similarly, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has also condemned Israel’s attack on Gaza, reaffirmed its support for Palestine and demanded a permanent ceasefire.¹⁴ In yet another diplomatic initiative, on 27 September 2024, Saudi Arabia along with several Arab, Islamic and European countries announced the formation of a Global Coalition aimed at implementing the two-state solution for the Israel–Palestine conflict.¹⁵

India has condemned the 7 October Hamas terrorist attack on Israel. At the same time, India has also expressed its support for Israel’s right to self-defence. India has appealed for cessation of hostilities, release of all Israeli hostages and has also supplied humanitarian aid to Palestine.

The debates at the ongoing 79th United Nations General Assembly meeting have also drawn a lot of statements from different world leaders on the ongoing Israel–Gaza and Israel–Hezbollah war. There have been repeated calls from the Arab and Islamic countries to de-escalate the conflict, secure a ceasefire and ensure humanitarian aid reaches all those in distress. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, on the other hand, mentioned in his UN General Assembly speech on 27 September that his country wants a “de-militarised and de-radicalised Gaza”. He also asserted that Israel will keep fighting until all the Israeli hostages are released by Hamas.

The US has been the most important support for Israel. It condemned the 7 October Hamas attack on Israel and has provided the much-needed political and military support to Israel. The US has time and again reiterated continuing its policy of unwavering support to Israel and its security. US President Joe Biden has announced America’s “ironclad commitment to Israel’s security”¹⁶ and Israel’s right to defend itself militarily against the threats of terrorism. The presence of the US Navy in the Red Sea

¹³ [“OIC Secretary-General Calls for Exposing the Crimes of Genocide Committed by the Israeli Occupation and Prosecuting it legally”](#), OIC, 24 February 2024.

¹⁴ [“Statement Issued by the Ministerial Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council During its 161st Session”](#), GCC, 9 September 2024.

¹⁵ [“Saudi Arabia, Allies Seek to Push Forward Two-state Solution to Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”](#), *Arab News*, 27 September 2024.

¹⁶ [“Readout of President Joe Biden’s Call with Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel”](#), White House, 28 April 2024.

and the Mediterranean Sea has also helped Israel’s security from the threats in the region. The US support has provided strength to not only continue the military operations but also the wade through the criticism it has faced from around the globe.

Russia, while condemning the Hamas attacks on Israel has also condemned the Israeli actions in Gaza. Russia has appealed for a permanent ceasefire, release of Israeli hostages by Palestine and the Palestinians detained by Israel since the beginning of the war.¹⁷ Russia made a ceasefire proposal at the UNSC in October 2023 that was not passed as it did not condemn the Hamas attack on Israel. In February 2024, Russia hosted a meeting of the major Palestinian political factions including Hamas and Fatah in order to achieve unity among them. Moscow also blames the US and its policies in the region for the escalation in West Asia. Israel’s relationship with Russia has deteriorated as a result of the Russian position on the war.

Like Russia, China has also made efforts to bring the Palestinian factions together and forge unity between them. Beijing has been trying to play a politically relevant role in the region beyond its engagements in trade and energy. In July 2024, China invited leaders from 14 different groups, including Hamas and Fatah, to Beijing and an agreement of cooperation was signed between them. The Beijing reconciliation meeting also agreed that the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) is the sole and legitimate representative of all the Palestinian people.¹⁸ China, without condemning the Hamas attack on Israel, has condemned the Israel war on Gaza. There is a commonality in the positions of Russia and China regarding the Israel–Hamas war. Both appeal that the Israeli attacks on Gaza should stop immediately and have described it as a “collective punishment” of the people of Gaza.¹⁹

Israel–Iran Escalation

The Israel–Hamas war has once again brought the contentious Israel–Iran relationship to the fore. Since the beginning of the war, Iran has expressed its support for Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis fighting against Israel. While Israel had accused Iran of funding and supporting these non-state actors to wage war against it, this war witnessed the first direct military confrontation between Israel and Iran moving beyond the condemnations and threats.

As the war advanced, Iran which has been leading the anti-Israel narrative in the region, eventually got militarily involved as well. The situation escalated when Israel

¹⁷ [“Statement by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at a UN Security Council Open Debate on the Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 17 July 2024.

¹⁸ [“Chinese FM: PLO Sole Legitimate Representative of Palestinian People”](#), *Wafa News Agency*, 23 July 2024.

¹⁹ [“Veto of Security Council Resolution Calling for Ceasefire in Gaza Emboldens Israel to Continue Crimes against Palestinian People, Speakers Tell General Assembly”](#), United Nations, 5 March 2024.

attacked the Iranian consulate in Damascus on 1 April 2024 killing seven Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officials. Iran launched a major retaliatory Iranian attack on Israel on 13 April with more than 300 drones and missiles fired towards Israel. Most of these projectiles were intercepted by Israel, but this was the first direct Iranian attack on Israel and the biggest escalation in the war. Later, the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh who was attending the inauguration ceremony of President Masoud Pezeshkian in Tehran on 31 July 2024, allegedly by Israel, further escalated the situation.

Test for the Abraham Accords

The Abraham Accords, signed in September 2020, normalised Israel’s relations with the UAE and Bahrain. Both these countries exchanged ambassadors with Israel and opened embassies in Tel Aviv. Other Arab countries such as Sudan and Morocco have also signed normalisation agreements with Israel. The ongoing war has been a test of resiliency for the Abraham Accords. Bahrain withdrew its ambassador to Israel in November 2023 as the war intensified.

Saudi Arabia and Israel started secret negotiations at the official level to normalise their relationship ending their decades-long antagonism. This could have tremendously impacted West Asia's regional geopolitics and security. However, the Saudi Arabia–Israel talks had to be suspended due to Hamas attacks on Israel and the subsequent war in Gaza. US President Biden has claimed that the Hamas attack on Israel was primarily intended to disrupt the Saudi Arabia–Israel normalisation talks.²⁰ As the war enters into further uncertainty, Saudi Arabia has now reiterated that the kingdom will not recognise Israel unless the independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital is established.²¹ As a result of the war, Israel’s normalisation agreements with the Arab countries now face a litmus test.

Growing Uncertainty

A year into the war, the situation in the region remains tense and unpredictable amid the calls for de-escalation from the international community. The worsening situation in Gaza, coupled with the escalation on the Lebanese front and persisting tensions in the Red Sea, raises serious concerns about the region’s security and stability. Intensifying military engagement on multiple fronts indicates the complexity of the conflict, the stubborn position of the parties involved and the failure of the mediation efforts to broker a ceasefire.

²⁰ [“Biden Says Hamas Attack Was to Halt Israel-Saudi Arabia Thaw”](#), *Bloomberg*, 21 October 2023.

²¹ [“Saudi Arabia Will Not Recognize Israel Without Palestinian State, Crown Prince Tells Shoura Council”](#), *Arab News*, 18 September 2024.

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