

CSIR Newsletter

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Content

- 1. Experts Opinion on Israel-Hamas War**
- 2. News Brief- India and the World**
- 3. CSIR in Media**

The CSIR Newsletter is the compilation of news of international affairs collected from different sources. It also includes opinions and brief news analysis. The CSIR team expresses its gratitude to all sources of information that helped compile the news and generate opinions on the subject.

Experts Opinion on Israel- Hamas War

Hamas: Israel's Existential Threat

Aswini K Mohapatra*

The Islamic Resistance Movement, popularly known by its Arabic acronym as Hamas (Harakat al-Muqawwama al-Islamiya) has been in the spotlight since its horrific terror attacks in southern Israel on 7 October, killing some 1,400 people and seizing about 240 hostages. Although Israel has launched a deadly retaliatory operation to wipe out Hamas, its growing popularity as the leading Palestinian voice of violent resistance remains an enduring source of security threat to the Jewish state.

Hamas appeared in the Palestinian political scene during the early days of the first Intifada, the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation as an activist wing of the Muslim Brotherhood founded in Egypt in the late 1920s. Contesting the predominance of secular nationalists represented by al-Fatah, the core faction within the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) led by Yasser Arafat, Hamas sought to direct the Palestinian revolt based on its vision of an all-Islamic Palestine. With the onset of the US-mediated Oslo peace process, Hamas grew in strength partly because of its steadfast opposition to the idea of coexistence with the Jewish state and in greater part, its large social infrastructure. Holding on to its rejectionist line, Hamas unleashed a spate of suicide attacks inside Israel to abort the process of accommodation and undermine the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority (PA) created as part of the Oslo Accords signed between Israel and the PLO in 1993.

Subsequently, when the Oslo process faltered over a host of contentious issues about the return of Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements, status of Jerusalem and borders, the enfeebled Fatah-dominated Palestinian self-governing authority suffered progressive erosion of popular support. As the tottering of the Oslo arrangement collapsed in the wake of the second intifada in 2001, Hamas took the lead in organising the violent Palestinian resistance, posing a formidable challenge to the internally divided Fatah after the death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004. Fatah, which dominated the Palestinian national movement for several decades, lost to its rival, Hamas in the 2006 Parliamentary elections securing only 32 percent of popular votes.

Unable to come to terms with the loss of hegemony over the political system, Fatah, supported by Israel, the United States and the European Union, made systematic attempts to obstruct Hamas's integration into the PA. The intense factional rivalry marked by violent clashes finally ended with the territorial and political division of the PA into two separate entities, Fatahland and Hamastan. While Fatah continues to rule over the West Bank under President Mahmoud Abbas since 2005, Hamas has consolidated its hold over the Gaza Strip since its forcible takeover in June 2007. Despite the non-recognition of the Hamas-led Palestinian authority in Gaza and repeated Israeli incursions, Hamas has not renounced jihad as an instrument of anti-Israeli resistance.

For Hamas, Palestine is a religious issue that defies political settlement, and any negotiation over Palestine amounts to treason. Its 1988 Charter describes Palestine as a religious trust or waqf that should remain under Muslim control for eternity. It considers the Jewish state on the Palestinian territory as an utter absurdity that will be inevitably destroyed. The destruction of Israel will be accomplished by spreading the spirit of Jihad. By legitimising violence under the hallowed cover of Jihad, Hamas has invested religious sanctity in its campaign for the extermination of Israel.

It is, indeed, the cry for a holy war that serves as an emotional missile carrying Hamas power. Nothing better illustrates this than the effectiveness of its military wing, known as the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades. Named after a Syrian cleric who fought the British and Jews in Palestine in the 1930s, the al-Qassam Brigades are Hamas's hardest group of cells dedicated to suicide missions and armed struggle. The latest atrocities inside Israel testify to its potential to strike terror at the very heart of the Zionist state.

With its loose, cell-like structures, networks of underground tunnels and above all, exemplary leadership, Hamas has not only withstood Israeli reprisals but also developed into an integral part of the Palestinian political landscape. So much so that Hamas has emerged as the leading voice of the Palestinian struggle amid Israel's creeping annexation of Palestinian lands through the expansion of Jewish settlements and relocation of Palestinian families. In other words, the political ascendancy of Hamas has more to do with the dissipating legitimacy of the secular nationalists in a truncated Palestinian State than the Islamist glorification of martyrdom and emphasis on social puritanism.

No matter how effective the Israeli military operations may have been in terms of neutralising the Hamas terror threat, it seems doubtful if long-term security of nearly ten million Israelis can be achieved without addressing the core political issue of Palestinian statehood. Successive military campaigns in the past, notably Operation Cast Lead in December 2018, Operation Protective Edge in July 2014 and Operation Wall Guardian in May 2021 yielded precious little save a short-lived break in the cycle of violence. After all, it is the eclipse of the two-state solution enshrined in the Oslo Accords, which, together with the abandonment of the Palestinian Authority (PA), created space for radical Islamists to pursue their theo-political agenda and hijack the Palestinian national movement, emboldened by external support from ambitious regional actors vying for influence.

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Hamas-Israel Struggle: Geo-cultural or Geo-political

Rajiv Nayan*

Hamas initiated an extensive assault from Gaza into Israel on October 7, 2023, resulting in the deaths of 1,400 Israelis and the abduction of over two hundred civilians. This marked the largest loss of life from a terrorist attack in Israel in over fifty years, highlighting a significant intelligence failure by the Israeli government. In response, Israel promptly launched substantial missile strikes on Gaza and deployed ground forces. The Gaza Health Ministry estimates that more than 25000 Palestinians have lost their lives because of the Israeli counterattack.

As is customary, the attack sparked a global debate on the geopolitical implications of the conflict. Analysts expressed concerns that the ongoing Israeli bombings might draw neighbouring nations into the conflict. While initial fears have not materialised thus far, predicting the future of the conflict remains challenging. Fortunately for Israel, the Islamic world is still divided, and there hasn't been a unified mobilisation against Israel.

Iran is considered the principal rogue, supporting Hamas—the elected terrorist group. Iran is demonstrating its strength as the primary and dominant military force opposing Israel. Western analysts maintain that the Iranian government was satisfied with its designated Axis of Resistance, comprising militant factions in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, taking charge of the military reaction. This involved initiating missile, drone, and rocket assaults against Israel, U.S. forces in the region, and international shipping.

Hizbollah and the leaders of Shia Iraqi factions maintain the strongest connections with Tehran. Hamas, characterised as a Sunni Islamist movement, and the Houthis, who belong to the Zaydi Shia sect, have less ideological alignment with Iran. However, their ties with the republic have deepened over the years, particularly as they fought against the Saudi-led coalition from their base in northern Yemen.

The geopolitical ramifications, as analysts describe them, are essentially rooted in the longstanding geo-cultural tensions that have persisted in the region for decades, and one could argue, for about a couple of centuries. Profound tensions and disagreements regarding territory, sovereignty, and identity form the core of the conflict between Israel and Hamas. This conflict primarily revolves around the Israeli-Palestinian issue, with each side maintaining distinct cultural, historical, and political narratives.

The Holocaust stands out as a 20th-century aberration. Apart from that tragic episode, the pursuit of the Jewish homeland has, since the 19th century, gradually escalated into a violent conflict between Palestinians and Jews. The conflict has led to numerous instances of violence, involving military clashes, acts of terrorism, and retaliations from both sides. Persistent tensions are fueled by issues like the status of Jerusalem, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and the creation of a Palestinian state. International attempts to mediate and achieve a lasting resolution encounter substantial challenges due to the deeply ingrained geocultural aspects of the dispute.

Interestingly, before the 19th century, Jews primarily faced conflicts with Europeans and Christians. Although this cultural divide is not as prominent today, it has not entirely vanished. For instance, when South Africa brought a case to the International Court of Justice to restrict Israel, several European countries, including Germany, supported Israel. However, when Hamas attacked Israel, neo-Nazis in Germany targeted Jews who were protesting in favour of Israel.

The current wave of violence is a manifestation of the longstanding cultural distrust between Islamic and Jewish entities. This cultural clash unfolds on various levels, presently manifesting as a conflict between state and non-state actors, with proxies playing a crucial role. The question of whether the two-state solution could contribute to regional peace remains uncertain at this stage. While it's premature to provide a definitive answer, there is a prevailing global belief that, to a significant extent, it might be a viable option.

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Hamas and the changing dynamics of the Israel-Palestinian conflict

Nisha Bakshi*

While the Israel-Hamas truce was expected to ease tensions amid multiple extensions of ceasefire facilitating the exchange of captives on both sides, peace still eludes the region. Over three months have passed since the Israel-Palestinian conflict began on October 7, 2023, when Hamas, a radical Islamist group in Palestine launched massive military attacks on Israel from Gaza, resulting in the killing and captivity of many innocent Israeli civilians. As of now, there seems to be no end to the ongoing military confrontation between Israel and Hamas shortly. Several scholars studying patterns of wars and conflicts, while citing various factors, including historical animosities, to explain the nature and dynamics of the present Israel-Palestinian conflict, also cite political factors that have contributed to its prolonged continuation. The present conflict between Israel and Hamas seems to have turned into one of the most violent confrontations, giving the impression of Hamas being more intransigent and disruptive than before in holding the ground against Israel, which is known for its robust and impregnable defence system. While Israel continues with its blocking of all the supplies entering Gaza along with its persistent military action to eradicate Hamas, the latter appears adamant in its negotiations with Israel.

The roots of Hamas's growing hold in and around Palestine can be traced to the First Intifada launched by the Palestinians against Israeli settlement in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Hamas was founded in 1987 by a Palestinian Imam and activist Ahmed Yassin, who was earlier associated with an Islamic charity organization called Mujama al-Islamia which, in collaboration with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Palestinian branch, used to offer social services such as medical treatments, the distribution of food, and building youth clubs, schools, and mosques for the Palestinians. Later, the philanthropic image of Yassin and his Mujama associates was exposed when they were found imposing radical

religious restrictions on the citizens of Palestine and also secretly stockpiling weapons. Hamas, which was initially designated as a paramilitary force of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood, very soon transitioned into a terrorist organisation following its involvement in various suicide attacks and bombings carried out against Israeli people and institutions.

During the first intifada itself, the militant group started its positioning by rejecting the Oslo Accord, whereby Yasser Arafat of the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation) and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak had strived to broker partial peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Riding high on its success as a militant organisation, Hamas also made its debut in the political field by winning the legislative elections in Gaza with the largest number of seats, resulting in the establishment of its full-fledged military and political control over the region. Since then, Hamas seems to have been using Gaza as its major military base for launching direct military attacks on Israel.

The supporters of Hamas back its growing radicalization and emboldened position against Israel, as they consider the radical group's anti-Israeli military attacks in the interests of the Palestinian people. Notwithstanding the support being enjoyed by Hamas among a section of the population due to its stand on the Palestinian issue, the present crisis draws attention to the unfolding of an alarming trend showing how the emboldening of radical actors, including Hamas encourages them not only to take reckless decisions causing greater risks to the lives of innocent civilians but also drives them to act as the de facto authority. Arguably, it is not the Israel-Palestinian conflict that can be said to be the only factor accounting for the radicalization. The weakening of the nascent Palestinian National Authority (PNA) is equally responsible for making room for the militant group to grow in strength, posing as an alternative to the secular nationalist PLO. At present, there are speculations that if Hamas survives the Israeli military operation, the group will emerge as an inexorable stakeholder in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Conversely, if ever Israel succeeds in dismantling the radical Islamist faction, no Palestinian force seems to be capable of replacing Hamas.

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The Changing Dynamics of Saudi-Hamas Relations

Humayun Akhtar Nazmi *

In a surprising turn of events, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) recently hosted a high-profile delegation from Hamas. It was viewed as a possible melting of ice in their relationship given the history of tense ties, especially since Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip way back in 2007.

Reports suggest that the meeting was held on April 17, 2023, in which Hamas's political chief, Ismail Haniyeh, along with other key figures like Saleh al-Arouri and Khaled

Meshaal, were present. The purpose was to address several critical issues, including the question of Palestinian detainees in Saudi Arabia.

The meeting represents a potentially significant shift in regional diplomacy, as Saudi Arabia seems to be realigning its approach within the West Asian political panorama. This change is particularly notable against the backdrop of Saudi Arabia's broader diplomatic strategies and its efforts to diversify its relationships with various groups and states in the region. The move to mend relations with Hamas may be part of Riyadh's larger plan to manage its network of relationships in West Asia. For Hamas, the meeting was not only an opportunity to expand its diplomatic influence but also to address key concerns directly with a major regional power. The discussions are believed to have covered mutual interests and the potential resolution of longstanding issues.

The Saudi-Hamas dialogue is unfolding a dust-ridden chapter of a book known for sections of dynamic and often volatile politics. The relationship between the two remained strained after the arrest of some individuals associated with Hamas in Saudi Arabia. However, the recent release of Palestinian detainees by the Saudi authorities suggests its efforts to repair ties with other regional rivals. Arguably, this shift in Saudi policy also has more to do with the favourable public opinion in Saudi Arabia towards Hamas in the context of the ongoing Israeli war in the Gaza. In brief, Saudi policy change mirrors the unique interplay of political and religious factors and, more so, the process of realignment and adjustment unfolding in the wake of the protracted Israel-Hamas war in West Asia.

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News Brief

India and the World

PM Modi discusses West Asia, Israel-Hamas war with Iranian president

Speaking with Iranian President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi on November 06, 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi discussed the deadly conflict between Israel and the Hamas organisation, which has claimed close to 10,000 lives. The two leaders discussed the "tough situation" in the West Asia region and the Israel-Hamas conflict over the phone. They also emphasised the importance of de-escalation, ongoing humanitarian assistance, and an early return to peace and security.

Source: PM Modi discusses West Asia, Israel-Hamas war with Iranian president, Hindustan Times November 06, 2023 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/pm-modi-discusses-west-asia-israel-hamas-conflict-with-iranian-president-101699276736498.html>

PM Modi dials UAE President, hopes early resolution of humanitarian situation

On November 3, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The two leaders spoke on the phone about a variety of topics, such as the state of affairs in Western Asia and the necessity of bringing stability back to the area. In addition to exchanging opinions on the state of affairs in West Asia, the two leaders discussed their worries regarding terrorism, the weakening security, and the death toll among civilians. They also discussed how to improve bilateral cooperation even more within the parameters of the two countries' Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Source: Money Control News, November 03, 2023, <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/india/west-asia-issues-pm-modi-dials-uae-president-hopes-early-resolution-of-humanitarian-situation-11661231.html>

S. Jaishankar meets UK's new foreign secretary David Cameron, exchanges views on West Asia, Ukraine

External affairs minister S Jaishankar on Monday met Britain's newly appointed foreign secretary David Cameron. S. Jaishankar shared information about the meeting on social media platform X. It's a pleasure to meet UK Foreign Secretary @David_Cameron on his first day of work this afternoon. congratulated him on being appointed. held a thorough conversation about maximising the benefits of our strategic alliance, Jaishankar wrote.

Source: Hindustan Times, November 12, 2023, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/jaishankar-meets-uks-new-foreign-secretary-david-cameron-exchanges-views-on-west-asia-ukraine-101699888007969.html>

COP28 president seeks solidarity for climate amid escalating conflict in West Asia

The 2023 UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) president Sultan Al Jaber on October 30 urged all countries to show solidarity for the climate cause even as “too many things were dividing the world at the moment”. Al Jaber emphasised that there is a need to come together on climate issues and to send a strong message of stability, prosperity, solidarity, and hope. The remarks were made in light of Israel's increasing ground offensive in Gaza and the ongoing bombardment of the besieged Palestinian enclave.

The COP28 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), from November 30 to December 12, is clouded by the worsening conflict in West Asia. In order to meet the Paris Goal of keeping warming to 1.5°C, it was anticipated that COP28 would result in an agreement to reduce emissions by at least 43% over the following seven years. The close proximity of the COP28 venue to the conflict zone has caused uncertainty regarding efforts to forge consensus.

Source: COP28 prez seeks solidarity for climate amid escalating conflict in West Asia, Hindustan Times, October 30, 2023, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/environment/cop28-prez-seeks-solidarity-for-climate-amid-escalating-conflict-in-west-asia-101698646449309.html>

India, Bangladesh open rail link, power, port projects

On November 1, 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina launched three development projects with Indian assistance, two of which are anticipated to increase trade and enhance connectivity with the Northeastern states.

Today's opening of the Akhaura-Agartala rail link is a major turning point in the nine-year project. Modi said at a joint press conference, "This is the first rail link from Bangladesh to India's northeastern states." The Khulna-Mongla Port rail line project, which cost \$388.92 million in total and was carried out under Indian concessional credit, was also inaugurated. The project involves building a broad-gauge rail line between Mongla Port and Khulna's current rail system, a distance of about 65 km. The Maitree super thermal power plant was the third project, which is expected to help Bangladesh meet its growing power needs.

Source: India, Bangladesh open rail link, power, port projects, Mint, November 01, 2023, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/india-bangladesh-open-rail-link-power-port-projects-11698861294679.html>

Sri Lanka reaches agreement with India, Paris Club on debt treatment

Sri Lanka has reached a "agreement in principle" with India and the Paris Club group of creditors, which includes Japan, on a debt treatment plan that will enable it to access the next instalment of the nearly \$3 billion recovery package from the International Monetary Fund.

"The OCC [Official Creditor Committee] and Sri Lanka agreed on the main parameters of a debt treatment consistent with those of the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) arrangement between Sri Lanka and the IMF," the Paris Club said in a statement. The terms of the agreement were not specified in the statement, but the OCC stated that it "stands ready and looks forward to formalising" the agreement in a Memorandum of Understanding with Sri Lanka in the upcoming weeks.

Source: Sri Lanka reaches agreement with India, Paris Club on debt treatment, The Hindu, November 29, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lanka-reaches-agreement-with-india-paris-club-on-debt-treatment/article67587365.ece>

Central govt and Navy's new project to reconstruct an ancient 'stitched ship'

As part of the government's ongoing efforts to "reclaim India's long-lost heritage in different sectors," the Centre now intends to bring back the country's rich maritime history. Rebuilding an ancient stitched ship that is evocative of the ships that sailed the oceans on India's ancient maritime trade routes as far back as 2,000 years ago is a recent collaboration between the Ministry of Culture, the Indian Navy, and Goa-based Hodi Innovations. The Ministry of Culture has provided all funding for the project, even though the Indian Navy is in charge of the ship's design and construction and will be navigating it along historic maritime trade routes. The project will receive support during its execution phase from the ministries of shipping and external affairs. In December 2022, the project received approval from the National Implementation Committee, which was presided over by Amit Shah, the Home Minister.

Source: What is the Central govt and Navy's new project to reconstruct an ancient 'stitched ship'?, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-culture/govt-navy-new-project-ancient-stitched-ship-8944120/>

Hundreds celebrate arrival of first Indians to South Africa

On November 16, hundreds of South Africans of Indian descent of sixth and seventh generation, celebrated the arrival of their ancestors on this day in 1860 as indentured labourers with a range of events. To commemorate the 342 passengers who were the first indentured labourers to arrive in the city on November 16, 1860, the day began with the symbolic ringing of a bell mounted in the 1860 Heritage Centre in Durban.

Source: Hundreds celebrate arrival of first Indians to South Africa, India Today, November 16, 2023, <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/hundreds-celebrate-arrival-of-first-indians-to-south-africa-2463876-2023-11-16>

CSIR in Media

- ***Maldives muddles: India, China seesaw is normal, not a blow to India's influence***

Written by Amit Kumar,

October 15, 2023

Voices, India, Times of India

“Sceptics, who considered Muizzu’s win a “blow to India’s influence” in the Maldives, first must not forget that India’s neighbourhood first policy blended with SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)- PM Narendra Modi’s vision for the Indian Oceans region- is effectively working, and second, contesting the world’s second-largest economy is not a cakewalk. Muizzu in power means advantages to China, but not as advantageous as it was during the tenure of Abdula Yameen.”

[Voices](#), [India](#), Times of India

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/maldives-muddles-india-china-seesaw-is-normal-not-a-blow-to-indias-influence/>

- ***President Wickremesinghe in India: A ready answer to the Tamil question***

Written by Abhishek Srivastava

July 21, 2023,

Indian Express

“New Delhi has long believed that implementation of the 13th Amendment to Sri Lanka’s constitution – which guarantees some devolution of powers to Tamil regions – will go a long way in addressing ethnic tensions. Currently, India has some leverage on the issue.”

Opinion, Indian Express

<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/president-wickremesinghe-in-india-a-ready-answer-to-the-tamil-question-8852752/>