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# **The Role of External Powers in the Latest Israel-Hamas Conflict**

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# The Role of External Powers in the Latest Israel-Hamas Conflict

## Introduction

A sudden attack by Hamas at an Israeli music festival on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, sparked the Israel-Hamas conflict. In an astonishingly wide-ranging attack Hamas gunmen targeted as many as 22 locations outside the Gaza Strip, including towns and other communities up to 15 miles (24 kilometers) from the Gaza border.<sup>1</sup> Unknown numbers of soldiers and civilians were captured by Hamas fighters and taken into Gaza. According to Israeli media, citing rescue service officials, this was one of the deadliest attacks Israel faced in decades, with at least 250 people killed and 1,500 wounded.<sup>2</sup> Israeli strikes in retaliation also resulted in a minimum of 232 fatalities and 1,700 injuries in the Gaza Strip, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.<sup>3</sup>

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip has not only heightened regional tensions but also elicited a range of responses from important actors (the U.S., Iran, Gulf States, Arab nations, Turkey, and China) in the region's intricate geopolitical balance. The multifaceted nature of the conflict is becoming increasingly evident encompassing the dynamics ranging from Israel's military operations and the reactions of surrounding nations to this diplomatic posturing of major powers. This conflict has put the region's normalization process on the brink of derailment. US and European partners previously

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<sup>1</sup> Federman, Josef, and Amy Teibel. "The US Has Strongly Backed Israel's War against Hamas. The Allies Don't Seem to Know What Comes next | AP News." AP News, November 2, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-11-1-2023-blinken-netanyahu-d57766fd8e55500ff6f16b78b3560d51>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

welcomed this de-escalation period. Jake Sullivan, the US National Security advisor, said less than two weeks ago that "the amount of time I have to spend on crisis and conflict in the Middle East today, compared to any of my predecessors going back to 9/11, is significantly reduced," even though he acknowledged that challenges still exist.<sup>4</sup> The Abraham Accords and the fallacious belief that regional peace can be achieved without acknowledging the reality of the occupied Palestinian people have dominated recent efforts in the region, now that myth has been debunked.<sup>5</sup> While much of the Middle East is calling for peace, and only a small number of Middle Eastern states establishing relations with Israel, this conflict threatens the "New Middle East" that has emerged in response to shifting regional dynamics. More importantly, the Palestinian leadership is ineffectual and has been further undermined by the current events; the Israeli government is radical and does not want to make any concessions, and the U.S. administration is focused on the upcoming presidential elections.<sup>6</sup>

The conflict is significantly impacting the world, with the Ukraine war in the backdrop already resulting in a global energy and food crisis taking a greater toll on the world. Moreover, critical initiatives such as IMEC and Vision 2030 are also being compromised as a result of this conflict. Over forty US transport aircrafts, twenty British transport aircrafts, and seven heavy transport helicopters carrying troops, equipment, and weapons arrived at RAF Akrotiri, according to an article published in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz. Furthermore, it is believed that, Pakistan is supplying Israel with 155mm shells during its conflict with Hamas, despite Islamabad's long-standing support for the Palestinian cause and particular

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<sup>4</sup> Wakil, Dr Sanam . "MENA Countries Should Lead the Way De-Escalating the Israel–Hamas War." Chatham House, October 11, 2023. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/10/mena-countries-should-lead-way-de-escalating-israel-hamas-war>.

<sup>5</sup> Yerkes, Rafiah Al Talei Nathan J. Brown, Yasmine Farouk, Mohanad Hage Ali, Amr Hamzawy, Zaha Hassan, Marwan Muasher, Sinan Ülgen, Maha Yahya, Sarah. "Arab Perspectives on the Middle East Crisis." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 13, 2023. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/10/13/arab-perspectives-on-middle-east-crisis-pub-90774>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

opposition to the existence of the state of Israel.<sup>7</sup> All this report indicates is that Israel is preparing for a long battle possibly leading to a prolonged war, which may turn out like the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict.

This conflict requires global cooperation and mediation, as the circumstances are different wherein U.S. influence over the Middle East is decreasing, and there is China with its increased leverage in the region. In addition, this conflict has also put the future of Palestine at stake as it is clear Israel would not tolerate the Gaza Strip being controlled by Hamas. Moreover, there is also a glimpse of the current geopolitical gameplay displayed in the conflict. Therefore, this article will focus on external powers and their differing viewpoints and roles in this conflict

## The Role of Al Aqsa Mosque in the conflict

Mohammed Deif, the Palestinian militant who is the covert mastermind behind the attack, refers to it as Al Aqsa Flood.<sup>8</sup> The Al Aqsa Mosque has been a source of contention since the 1967 war.<sup>9</sup> As a result of the strong religious sentiments attached to the mosque, neither the Jews nor the Muslims have reached a satisfactory consensus. . After Mecca and Medina, the mosque is regarded by Muslims worldwide as the third-holiest location in Islam. While the Jews believe that the Biblical Jewish temples once stood on this compound.<sup>10</sup> However, Jewish law and the Israeli Rabbinate forbid Jews from praying inside the

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<sup>7</sup> Team, Wion Web. "Israel-Hamas War: Pakistan Supplies Israel with 155mm Shells, Claims Report." WION, November 19, 2023. <https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/israel-hamas-war-pakistan-supplies-israel-with-155mm-shells-claims-report-660031>.

<sup>8</sup> Nakhoul, Samia, and Laila Bassam. "Who Is Mohammed Deif, the Hamas Commander behind the Attack on Israel?" Reuters, October 11, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-secretive-hamas-commander-masterminded-attack-israel-2023-10-10/>.

<sup>9</sup> India Today. "Why Al-Aqsa Mosque Is Important in the Israel-Palestine Conflict | Explained," October 11, 2023. <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/why-al-aqsa-mosque-is-important-in-the-israel-palestine-conflict-explained-2447607-2023-10-11>.

<sup>10</sup> Prisha. "Explained | Blood-Stained Story of Al Aqsa Mosque Compound at the Heart of Israel-Hamas War." WION, October 12, 2023. <https://www.wionews.com/world/explained-bloodied-conflict-of-al-aqsa-mosque-that-stands-in-centre-of-israel-hamas-war-645984>.

compound because they view it as too sacred to trespass.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the Israeli soldiers were permitted entry to the location, and Christian pilgrims were also granted permission to visit the Temple Mount, which they deemed sacred due to its association with incidents in Jesus Christ's life.<sup>12</sup>

Over the past few years, tension has been building slowly and this conflict can be seen as an outburst of past actions. In 2014, Israeli authorities closed off access to Al-Aqsa, causing demonstrations among Palestinians and sparking the second Palestinian insurrection, the al-Aqsa Intifada. This led to a 10-day war with Gaza in 2021.<sup>13</sup> In April 2023, unprovoked attacks on Palestinians praying at the Al-Aqsa Mosque fueled enrage among Muslims and Arab nations, causing a 10-day war with Gaza.<sup>14</sup>

## **World in Disarray: Unveiling the Schisms Amplified by the Israel-Hamas Conflict**

Due to the conflict, the divisions in the world have deepened, as major global powers have different views on this matter, resulting in difficulty reaching a consensus globally. On the one hand, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu referred to Israel's ongoing ground operations inside the Gaza Strip as "the second phase" pledging to "destroy the enemy above ground and below ground".<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the goal of the military operation in Gaza, according to Israel's military leadership, is to "destroy the government and

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> India Today. "Why Al-Aqsa Mosque Is Important in the Israel-Palestine Conflict | Explained," October 11, 2023. <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/why-al-aqsa-mosque-is-important-in-the-israel-palestine-conflict-explained-2447607-2023-10-11>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Mackenzie, James, and Maayan Lubell. "Israel Launches Gaza War's Second Phase with Ground Operation, Netanyahu Says." Reuters, October 29, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/eu-calls-humanitarian-pauses-gaza-aid-israel-raids-enclave-2023-10-26/>.

military capacity of Hamas and the terrorist organizations."<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, Hamas which took 240 hostages from Israel, is defending the Gaza Strip against Israel's ground operation. As per Hamas, it is a religious mandate to murder Jews. The Hamas charter states that Jews are to blame for every war and catastrophic historical incident, even those in which Jews themselves were victims.<sup>17</sup> Despite the tough position of both parties in the conflict, there are peace talks between them facilitated by Qatar (a third-party mediator).<sup>18</sup>

Three factions have been formed in this dispute, due to the involvement of external actors. To begin with, the United States unequivocally supports Israel, both in terms of financial assistance and on the global stage. On October 18, U.S. President Biden visited Israel and reaffirmed his full backing for Israel's efforts to combat Hamas and its allies. On October 18, the United States exercised its veto power to reject a draft resolution regarding the war in the UN Security Council.<sup>19</sup> More importantly, the U.S. has also taken military action in support of Israel. To comfort Israel and other U.S. allies and to warn Iran and Hezbollah against escalating the confrontation, the President ordered the Department of Defense to place two U.S. carrier strike groups in the eastern Mediterranean Sea and increased U.S. aviation assets in the area.<sup>20</sup>

- The second faction consists of Iran and Iran-backed resistance axis groups like Hezbollah and Houthi rebels that support Hamas. Iran is Israel's sworn enemy. It organized, trained, armed, and continues to

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<sup>16</sup> United States Institute of Peace. "How the Israel-Hamas War Impacts Regional Relations," n.d. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/10/how-israel-hamas-war-impacts-regional-relations>.

<sup>17</sup> Sa'ar, Gideon. "Israel-Hamas Conflict Is the West's War Too." POLITICO, November 24, 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/this-is-the-west-s-war-too/>.

<sup>18</sup> Mills, Andrew . "How Qatar's Assertive Diplomacy Won a Break in the Gaza War." Reuters, December 2, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-qatar-swayed-israel-hamas-make-truce-work-2023-11-30/>.

<sup>19</sup> Congressional Research Service. "Israel and Hamas October 2023 Conflict: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)," October 20, 2023. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47754>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

support several sub-state armed groups operating there. The largest and most well-known is Hezbollah, which is based in Lebanon.<sup>21</sup> The ongoing or recent conflicts in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq are further complicated by Iran's presence through established proxy groups.<sup>22</sup> This camp is responding to Israel in its capacity wherein Iran is trying to win over the Islamic world by promoting anti-Israel sentiments among common people. At a press conference in Tehran, Mr. Amir-Abdollahian (Iran's Foreign Minister) stated, "I warn the US and its proxy Israel that if they do not immediately stop the crime against humanity and genocide in Gaza, anything is possible at any moment and the region will go out of control."<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, over the last month, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen, being a part of the Iran-backed "resistance axis" of political and armed groups in the region, have been fighting cross-border with Israel to show support for Hamas fighters.<sup>24</sup>

The rest of the world is part of the third faction wherein some nations are calling for peace and pleading for the safety of innocent civilians who are caught in the crossfire and there are nations in this faction that oppose Israel's conduct but support Palestine rather than Hamas. This group includes the Palestinian Authority, Gulf States, North Africa, Egypt, Jordan, China, India, and to some extent Europe all fall under this category. The member states of the League of Arab States (Arab League) have also unitedly demanded the protection of civilians and the prevention of further escalation.<sup>25</sup> The People's Republic of China's

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<sup>21</sup> Kusovac, Zoran. "Analysis: The Foreign Factors in Israel's War on Gaza." Al Jazeera, October 30, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/30/analysis-the-foreign-factors-in-israels-war-on-gaza#:~:text=Its%20neighbours%20%E2%80%93%20Egypt%2C%20Jordan%2C,and%20to%20avoid%20further%20escalation.>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Goksedef, By Ece. "Iran Warns Israel to Stop War in Gaza or Region Will 'Go out of Control.'" BBC News, October 22, 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67188346>.

<sup>24</sup> Motamedi, Maziar. "Iran Unveils Upgraded Hypersonic Missile as Khamenei Touts Israel 'Failure.'" Al Jazeera, November 19, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/19/iran-unveils-upgraded-hypersonic-missile-as-khamenei-touts-israel-failure>.

<sup>25</sup> Congressional Research Service. "Israel and Hamas October 2023 Conflict: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)," October 20, 2023. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47754>.



Foreign Ministry stated on October 13 that China urges "all parties to exercise restraint, de-escalate the situation on the ground as soon as possible, and prevent further expansion of the conflict." To prevent a serious humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the priority is to guarantee the safety of civilians and open humanitarian corridors.<sup>26</sup>

## International Dynamics at Play: Unpacking the Involvement of External Powers in the Israel-Gaza Conflict

The external players could play a critical role in this ongoing conflict, by providing humanitarian aid, fostering a consensus on an international level, and ultimately persuading both parties to agree to a ceasefire and bring an end to the conflict. Individually, each nation or region has a role to play in this conflict.

### The United States of America

The U.S. has maintained close diplomatic relations with Israel since its establishment in 1948. The U.S. has aided Israel in past conflicts, and this time was no different.<sup>27</sup> Israeli officials were assured yet again that day of "our ironclad support for Israel's security and right to self-defense" stated Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the United States Permanent Representative to the UN.<sup>28</sup> Apart from the military and international support to Israel, the U.S. has also played a role in the humanitarian situation caused due to the war. On October 18, President Biden announced \$100 million in humanitarian aid from the United

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<sup>26</sup> "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on October 13, 2023," n.d. [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/202310/t20231013\\_11160691.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202310/t20231013_11160691.html).

<sup>27</sup> Robinson, Kali. "What Is U.S. Policy on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?" Council on Foreign Relations, July 12, 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-us-policy-israeli-palestinian-conflict>.

<sup>28</sup> "Statement by Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield on Attacks on Israel," October 7, 2023. <https://usun.usmission.gov/statement-by-ambassador-linda-thomas-greenfield-on-attacks-on-israel/>.

States for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. Additionally, he affirmed the intention to route international aid to Gaza through Egypt.<sup>29</sup>

Despite supporting Israel against Hamas, the U.S. ensured that there must be diplomatic engagement between both parties given that few Americans were also taken hostage.<sup>30</sup> This is evident as the U.S. played an important role in convincing Israel in the recent hostage deal. During the weeks preceding the agreement, US President Joe Biden had several urgent meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani as part of the covert endeavor.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, humanitarian aid and securing the release of prisoners were at the forefront of Biden's talks with Netanyahu and his war cabinet according to an official.<sup>32</sup>

On the governance issue looming over Palestine and the Gaza Strip, the U.S. has completely opposed the Hamas governance and Israel's occupation of Gaza. Blinken declared that Hamas would never be allowed to retake control of Gaza during a hearing before the US Senate. "Eventually, it would be most sensible for Gaza's governance and security to be under the control of an efficient and resurgent Palestinian Authority," he stated.<sup>33</sup> Then he restated the declared objective of President Joe Biden, which was to revive

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<sup>29</sup> Samuels, Brett. "The Hill." The Hill, October 18, 2023. <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/4262427-biden-announces-humanitarian-aid-deal-for-gaza/#:~:text=President%20Biden%20announced%20an%20agreement,Gaza%20and%20the%20West%20Bank.>

<sup>30</sup> Holland, Steve. "The Secret Negotiations That Led to the Gaza Hostages Deal." Reuters, November 22, 2023. [https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/secret-negotiations-that-led-gaza-hostages-deal-2023-11-22/.](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/secret-negotiations-that-led-gaza-hostages-deal-2023-11-22/)

<sup>31</sup> Jazeera, Al. "Behind the Scenes: How the Israel-Hamas Truce Deal Came Together." Al Jazeera, November 22, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/22/behind-the-scenes-how-did-the-israel-hamas-truce-deal-unfold.>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Federman, Josef, and Amy Teibel. "The US Has Strongly Backed Israel's War against Hamas. The Allies Don't Seem to Know What Comes next | AP News." AP News, November 2, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-11-1-2023-blinken-netanyahu-d57766fd8e55500ff6f16b78b3560d51.>

efforts to create a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>34</sup> The U.S. role in the future of this conflict will be based on the humanitarian side to restrain Israel from turning back to airstrikes option which result in innocent civilian deaths as President Joe Biden would not like to face public pressure when there are elections upcoming in the U.S. <sup>35</sup>

A resumption of hostilities, would probably elicit severe criticism from foreign powers towards the Netanyahu government, making American support even more vital for Israel. Nevertheless, Biden's support for Netanyahu has come at a political cost, both domestically and internationally. The vital national interests of Israel's and the United States' are not always or permanently aligned. Therefore, it will be interesting to see if Netanyahu has political leeway when it comes to military tactics or if he is willing to lessen the pressure on Biden in the days ahead.<sup>36</sup>

## Iran

Iran has supported Hamas in the conflict, due to its longstanding enmity towards Israel, and its enduring alliance with Hamas spanning decades. In the early 1990s, as Hamas sought to assume the mantle of Palestinian resistance to Israel against the backdrop of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)-Israel negotiations that culminated in the 1993 Oslo Accord, Iranian officials met with Hamas leaders and expressed public backing for the group and its goals.<sup>37</sup> In 1992, Hamas established a foreign office in

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Collinson, Stephen . “Wartime Unity between the US and Israel Will Soon Face Its Toughest Test.” CNN, November 30, 2023. <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/11/30/politics/us-israel-next-phase-war-hamas/index.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Congressional Research Service. “Israel and Hamas October 2023 Conflict: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs),” October 20, 2023. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47754>.

Iran.<sup>38</sup> However, Iran's relations with Hamas deteriorated during the Syrian civil war wherein Iran backed Bashar Al-Assad's regime in Syria, meanwhile, Hamas backed the resistant fighters.

However, ties between Iran and Hamas have since improved. . This can be evident in the top level of interactions held between Iran and Hamas in the past recent years. Alongside Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the leader of Hamas attended Qassem Soleimani's funeral in Tehran.<sup>39</sup> Soleimani was an Iranian general who was killed in an American airstrike in Iraq.

In a speech to Iranian mourners, Ismail Haniyeh referred to the deceased general, Qassem Soleimani, as “the martyr of Jerusalem.”<sup>40</sup> To "confront the Zionist project and the American influence," Haniyeh promised that militant Palestinian groups, including his organization that rules Gaza, would go in Soleimani's direction.<sup>41</sup>

Despite Iran's claims to the contrary, there are multiple reports and events that strongly suggest the deliberate nature of the recent strikes on Israel.. Initially, a media report from October 2023 cites an Israeli security source as saying Iran has greatly increased funding for Hamas' military wing in the past year, from \$100 million to approximately \$350 million annually..<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, multiple several outside experts have asserted that Hamas could not have planned an attack this intricate and resource-intensive

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> TOI STAFF and AGENCIES. “Hamas Leader Praises Soleimani at Tehran Funeral in Show of Support for Iran.” The Times of Israel, January 6, 2020. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-leader-praises-soleimani-at-tehran-funeral-in-show-of-support-for-iran/#:~:text=Haniyeh's%20appearance%20at%20the%20Tehran,identify%20more%20closely%20with%20Iran.>

<sup>40</sup> Ap. “Hamas Leader Haniyeh Attends Soleimani’s Funeral in Iran.” Arab News, January 7, 2020. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1609061/middle-east>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Nakhoul, Samia. “How Hamas Secretly Built a ‘mini-Army’ to Fight Israel.” Reuters, October 16, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-hamas-secretly-built-mini-army-fight-israel-2023-10-13/>.

without Iran's knowledge if not explicit support.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, it seems Iran might be aware of and backed Hamas however they would not have expected Hamas to create such havoc.

Iran has consistently provided substantial support to Hamas and has emerged as Israel's greatest adversary. Furthermore, its control of the resistance Axis militia would eliminate the need for active engagement in the fight. Iran is also in a tough position as it is expected to go to a complete war against Israel. Iran's fiery leaders run the risk of losing support from both allies and constituents if they do nothing. Hard-line conservatives in Iran have asked why their country's actions do not match their rhetoric about "freeing Al Quds," or Jerusalem, from Israeli rule.<sup>44</sup> However, it cannot risk a war with Israel and the U.S. at this point. Thus, Iran would likely use its resistance axis militias for the time being, risking its hands and avoiding getting directly involved to save its face. Iran has previously conveyed this sentiment through a warning issued by its foreign minister, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, which suggested that there is a good chance that regional militias in Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria will create several fronts against Israel and that the outcome "will not go the way that Israel's regime wants."<sup>45</sup>

Senior Quds Force and Hezbollah commanders in Iran believe that if Israel is successful in eliminating Hamas, it will then target them, according to the Iranians. Moreover, Iranian media reported that on October 22, during a ceremony in support of Gaza.<sup>46</sup> Brig. Gen. Ali Fadavi, the deputy commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps, declared that "if necessary, Iran will fire missiles toward Haifa." <sup>47</sup> Hence, should the situation escalate in the future, Iran could potentially intervene by signaling its

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<sup>43</sup> Warrick, Joby, Ellen Nakashima, Shane Harris, and Souad Mekhennet. "Hamas Received Weapons and Training from Iran, Officials Say." Washington Post, October 10, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/10/09/iran-support-hamas-training-weapons-israel/>.

<sup>44</sup> Fassihi, Farnaz. "Iran Faces a Dilemma in the Israel-Hamas War." The New York Times, November 2, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/01/world/middleeast/iran-israel-hamas.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

resistance axis or the independent group could undertake a unilateral action putting Iran in a difficult position from which it would need to defend itself.

## The Gulf States

The region is undergoing a significant transformation due to the presence of large-scale economic initiatives. Notably, countries such as the UAE and Bahrain have officially acknowledged Israel, making the Gulf states crucial in ensuring regional peace. This is evident in the case where Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, called for a joint Arab League and OIC meeting with the purpose to "unify efforts and come out with a unified collective position as countries feel the need to respond to the exceptional circumstances taking place in the Palestinian Gaza Strip."<sup>48</sup> During a visit to Moscow, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States (Arab League) Ahmed Aboul Gheit declared, "We completely reject violence, but on both sides," and that the Palestinian issue could not be put off any longer thus decisions made by the United Nations needed to be carried out.<sup>49</sup> Altogether, each key player in the Gulf region can play a different kind of role in limiting escalation.

The Gulf states have played an important role in the past as well to normalize ties with Israel, and in this situation as well as influence over the Islamic countries, the Gulf can de-escalate the situation if Israel can continue the truce. Particularly in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia will be keen to prevent any additional escalation. The threat of Iranian aggression was evident in the 2019 attacks on the oil installations in Khurais and Abqaiq, which momentarily shut down half of the country's oil production and sparked concerns about the security of Saudi Arabia's Mega or Giga projects.<sup>50</sup> Like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and

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<sup>48</sup> Jazeera, Al. "Arab-Islamic Summit Rejects Justifying Gaza War as Israeli Self-Defence." Al Jazeera, November 11, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/11/saudi-arabia-to-host-arab-islamic-summit-to-unify-efforts-on-gaza>.

<sup>49</sup> Faulconbridge, Guy. "Russia Accuses US of 'destructive' Approach on Israeli-Palestinian War." Reuters, October 9, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/kremlin-warns-there-is-risk-regional-escalation-after-israel-violence-2023-10-09/>.

<sup>50</sup> Foreign Policy Research Institute. "The End of De-Escalation in the Middle East? - Foreign Policy Research Institute," n.d. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/11/the-end-of-de-escalation-in-the-middle-east/>.

Bahrain are politically exposed during this crisis and will be keen to prevent regional conflict before hosting the COP28 climate conference in November and December 2023, as well as during a crucial phase of economic diversification.<sup>51</sup>

Surprisingly, the Gulf state's influencers have taken a pro-Israel stance. These influencers have been echoing pro-Israel stereotypes that have been prevalent in Western media since October 7. One of them is Saudi national Loay Al-Shareef, who identifies as a Zionist. Al-Shareef addressed Israelis in English in a reel that he uploaded to his Instagram page on October 11: He declared, "I have chosen to stand with the civilized world, not with the extremist or terrorist side that Hamas presents."<sup>52</sup> Even amid widespread outcry throughout the Arab World over the casualties in Gaza, these governments demonstrate their evolving views on Israel and the existence of new, emerging viewpoints within the Arab public sphere by providing a platform for pro-Israel Arab voices on social media.<sup>53</sup>

On the other side, Qatar has played a critical role in the recent negotiations to release hostages despite condemning Israel and having deep relations with Hamas like Iran. Qatar provides more financial support to Hamas, in comparison to Iran which provides military support. Qatar diplomacy has revolved around being a negotiator for the West against the extremist group due to its relations with both parties, thus keeping itself important for the West in the region, from the Doha Agreements between the Taliban and the U.S. to the recent Israel-Hamas truce, Qatar has always been present.<sup>54</sup> In this case, as well, as Hamas

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> El Taki, Karim, and Hind Al Ansari. "The Arab Gulf and Israel's War on Gaza." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 14, 2023.  
<https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/91002#:~:text=So%20far%2C%20the%20Gulf%20emirate,best%20bet%20for%20de%20Descalation.>

<sup>53</sup> El Taki, Karim, and Hind Al Ansari. "The Arab Gulf and Israel's War on Gaza." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 14, 2023.  
<https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/91002#:~:text=So%20far%2C%20the%20Gulf%20emirate,best%20bet%20for%20de%20Descalation.>

<sup>54</sup> France. "Qatar Burnishes Role as 'essential' Hostage Negotiator with Israel-Hamas Deal." France 24, November 22, 2023.  
<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231122-qatar-burnishes-role-as-essential-hostage-negotiator-with-israel-hamas-deal>.

leaders reside in Qatar, it used its leverage over Hamas leaders to address the hostage situation. Nevertheless, Qatar has a different view than Saudi Arabia and UAE as, Qatar stated on October 7 that it "holds Israel solely responsible for the ongoing escalation," allowing Hamas to maintain an office there.<sup>55</sup> The foundation of Qatar's effective hybrid networking and diplomatic infrastructure is its ability to manage wealth, make investments, and maintain intricate personal and professional ties throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and beyond, particularly with the United States.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, Qatar's role in this conflict has been to make sure diplomatic channels are open to avoid further escalation and provide a peaceful path to end the hostage situation.

## Immediate Neighbours: Egypt, Jordan, And Syria

The neighboring countries of Israel-Palestine hold varying perspectives on the political conflict, but they all share a common objective of preventing the escalation of this conflict. It has been observed in the past whenever a conflict fuels up between Israel-Palestine it results in catastrophic humanitarian disaster leading to an influx of refugees from the warzone to their country, and this time may be same as well. This concern is evident in the Egypt and Jordan statements in response to Israel's military action. President of Egypt Abdel Fattah El-Sisi declared that he would not consent to a resolution that would benefit some at the expense of others.<sup>57</sup> Fearing the precedent and the possibility that Israel would demand that a sizable number of West Bank Palestinians relocate to Jordan for Israeli forces to take on extremist organizations

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<sup>55</sup> "Qatar Expresses Concern over the Developments in Gaza Strip and Calls for De-Escalation," October 7, 2023. <https://www.mofa.gov.qa/en/statements/qatar-expresses-concern-over-the-developments-in-gaza-strip-and-calls-for-de-escalation>.

<sup>56</sup> Emily. "Qatar and the Israel-Hamas Conflict: Hybrid Mediation Power on Display." Open Access Government, November 24, 2023. <https://www.openaccessgovernment.org/qatar-and-the-israel-hamas-conflict-hybrid-mediation-power-on-display/170598/>.

<sup>57</sup> Awsat, Asharq Al. "Sisi: Egypt Won't Allow Termination of Palestinian Cause at Expense of Other Parties," October 11, 2023. <https://english.aawsat.com/arab-world/4598426-sisi-egypt-won%E2%80%99t-allow-termination-palestinian-cause-expense-other-parties>.



in the West Bank, King Abdullah of Jordan emphasized that Israel's forced displacement of a million Palestinians is a red line.<sup>58</sup>

## Egypt

Accordingly, Egypt has stated its support for a just peace and a Palestinian state, although there has already been unrest on its border with Gaza.<sup>59</sup> More importantly, Egypt has acted as a responsible neighboring state as it allowed humanitarian assistance to go through its borders, signaling its motive to tackle the humanitarian situation. Egypt has declared its willingness to use the Rafah crossing to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza and safe exit for foreign nationals and citizens of the United States.<sup>60</sup> To prevent Gazans from fleeing into the Sinai Peninsula, the Egyptian government, which has aided Israel in a year-long blockade of Gaza, has insisted that Israel permit humanitarian aid to reach Gaza.<sup>61</sup> There are four reasons for this: Egypt believes that Israel should bear the brunt of the Palestinian plight in the Gaza Strip; it is wary of possible security threats stemming from Hamas's ties to the self-declared Islamic State's Sinai Province affiliate; and it does not want to be held accountable for a wave of Palestinian refugees. Furthermore, Egypt worries that since Israel controlled Gaza until the Six-Day War against Israel in June 1967, Israel will attempt to shift accountability for the region onto Cairo.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> United States Institute of Peace. "How the Israel-Hamas War Impacts Regional Relations," n.d. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/10/how-israel-hamas-war-impacts-regional-relations>.

<sup>59</sup> Vakil, Sanam. "MENA Countries Should Lead the Way De-Escalating the Israel-Hamas War." Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank, October 12, 2023. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/10/mena-countries-should-lead-way-de-escalating-israel-hamas-war>.

<sup>60</sup> Congressional Research Service. "Israel and Hamas October 2023 Conflict: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)," October 20, 2023. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47754>.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Cook, Steven A. "Will Egypt Play a Role in Easing the Gaza War?" Council on Foreign Relations, October 16, 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/will-egypt-play-role-easing-gaza-war>.

Therefore, Egypt will be imperative for humanitarian aid during the conflict, and it may play a critical role in the security dimension alongside Israel even in the future, as Egypt's intelligence also perceives Hamas as a threat.

Additionally, Jordan has engaged in diplomatic efforts. Through Foreign Minister Ayman Al-Safadi, Jordan made diplomatic efforts at the UN, and the General Assembly adopted a resolution from Jordan that called for an "immediate, permanent, and sustainable humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities" and a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, with support from 120 nations.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, Jordan is currently grappling with a difficult economic situation caused by the presence of Palestinian refugees and the potential security risks posed by radicalised extremist groups exploiting Jordan's volatile population as a base of operations. Jordan has a unique past with Hamas, and this conflict can be a turning point in its relationship with Israel. Amman decided to remove its ambassador from Tel Aviv public on November 1<sup>st</sup>. Jordan then abandoned plans to sign a contract for the exchange of solar energy for desalinated water after 15 days.<sup>64</sup>

If this confrontation persists, Jordan will be forced to address its people's rage, which can be destabilizing for its relations with Israel, and potentially lead to the breakdown of the peace agreement. According to Foreign Minister Safadi and Prime Minister Khasawneh, the peace treaty is merely a piece of paper that gathers dust. In decades, Jordan has never taken a more radical stance on the peace treaty.<sup>65</sup> Thus, Jordan

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<sup>63</sup> Jbour, Abdullah. "Jordan and the Israeli War on Gaza: Shifts in Political Discourse." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 7, 2023. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/90930>.

<sup>64</sup> Jazeera, Al. "Jordan Recalls Ambassador to Israel to Protest Gaza 'Catastrophe.'" Al Jazeera, November 1, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/1/jordan-recalls-ambassador-to-israel-to-protest-gaza-catastrophe>.

<sup>65</sup> Cafiero, Giorgio. "Is the Gaza War a Turning Point for Jordan-Israel Relations?" The New Arab, n.d. <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/gaza-war-turning-point-jordan-israel-relations>.

can be the first nation to alter its relations and break the peace treaty with Israel due to this conflict. If this were to occur, it would be a negative sign, as it may encourage other governments to follow suit under public pressure, thereby undermining the ongoing efforts towards regional normalisation.

Syria under the Assad regime had a tough history with Hamas and was also blamed for targeting Palestinians. Until now, at the special summit of the Arab League, the Syrian government signed the resolution. However, it has made few contributions to the current conflict. The Syrian regime's response to the Gaza war has featured strident rhetoric but restrained action, as it does not wish to assume political and security risks on Hamas' behalf.<sup>66</sup> However Syria can determine the peace in the region, as few independent groups exist like Hezbollah, which may try to ignite a spark to drag the immediate neighborhood into the conflict. Therefore, it is imperative for Syria and other states to exercise restraint and act accordingly.

## Turkey

Throughout their 74-year relationship, Turkey has been Israel's closest neighbor and oldest friend in the Middle East. Nevertheless, Turkey has been the most severe critic of Israel among its neighbouring nations since the Hamas attack on October 7 and the commencement of the violent confrontation in Gaza.<sup>67</sup> Turkey's leader President Erdogan has been leading the anti-Israel sentiments in the world. . During a press conference in Berlin on November 17, President Erdogan made a public and undiplomatic accusation, stating that Germany and Europe are showing leniency towards Israel due to Germany's role

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<sup>66</sup> Schaer, Cathrin, and Omar Albam. "What Role Does Syria Play in the Hamas-Israel Conflict?" dw.com, November 18, 2023. <https://www.dw.com/en/what-role-does-syria-play-in-the-hamas-israel-conflict/a-67399322#:~:text=The%20Syrian%20government%20also%20signed,against%20Israel%2C%22%20Ramani%20explained.>

<sup>67</sup> Brookings. "The Sultan's Ghost: Erdoğan and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict | Brookings," November 22, 2023. [https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-sultans-ghost-erdogan-and-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/.](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-sultans-ghost-erdogan-and-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/)

in the Holocaust.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, Turkey's leader has come in support of Hamas, as with his conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP), Erdoğan declared to lawmakers that Hamas is a liberation group, the "mujahideen," fighting for its people and territory.<sup>69</sup> Lastly, the ambassadors of both nations (Israel and Turkey) have been called back, and Turkey has taken on the self-appointed task of holding Israel legally responsible for breaking international law during its Gaza offensive.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, although Turkey possesses the necessary capacity and advantageous geographical position to be a significant player, it has failed to fulfil its potential role in this conflict due to its biased stance, which hinders its ability to effectively mediate. In this conflict, Turkey's role has been more of a political standing as President Erdoğan is trying to utilize this conflict for his gain, in the upcoming elections in Turkey. Nevertheless, Turkey's involvement has the potential to undermine Israel's standing on the international stage, so exacerbating the complexity of the conflict. Arab leaders who wish to preserve their connections with Israel may find it more difficult to make decisions as a result of Ankara's emphasis on the conflict and the intensity of its criticism of Israel's military actions in Gaza.<sup>71</sup>

If the crisis persists and Turkey maintains its current stance, it will pose a significant challenge for the region to reach an understanding. Hence, it is imperative for the officials from the Biden administration to communicate with Turkey in order to apprise Erdoğan and other Turkish policymakers that Ankara

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<sup>68</sup> Von Der Burchard, Hans. "Germany Has a Psychology of Guilt; When It Comes to Holocaust, Israel, Erdoğan Says." POLITICO, November 18, 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/erdogan-and-scholz-clash-over-israel-hamas-war/>.

<sup>69</sup> Gumrukcu, Tuvan, and Huseyin Hayatsever. "Turkey's Erdogan Says Hamas Is Not Terrorist Organisation, Cancels Trip to Israel." Reuters, October 25, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkeys-erdogan-says-hamas-is-not-terrorist-organisation-2023-10-25/#:~:text=%22Hamas%20is%20not%20a%20terrorist,who%20fight%20for%20their%20faith.>

<sup>70</sup> Brookings. "The Sultan's Ghost: Erdoğan and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict | Brookings," November 22, 2023. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-sultans-ghost-erdogan-and-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/>.

<sup>71</sup> Brookings. "The Sultan's Ghost: Erdoğan and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict | Brookings," November 22, 2023. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-sultans-ghost-erdogan-and-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/>.

could do more to support the Palestinians in Gaza if it toned down its narrative in favor of Hamas. Washington needs to let Turkish officials know that obtaining the Jewish state's approval will eventually be necessary for Turkey to play a bigger role in the region.<sup>72</sup> Depending on how Ankara manages its relations with Israel and the US, Turkey might or might not play a role in a postwar Gaza; however, its decision regarding the matter will have an impact on forming public opinion worldwide as well as among Muslim communities residing in the West.<sup>73</sup>

## China

China's growing influence in the Middle East has seen it shift from an economic powerhouse to a player in regional politics. While this move aims to elevate China's standing, ongoing conflicts pose a significant challenge.. China initially advocated for "relevant parties to remain calm, exercise restraint, and immediately end hostilities," adopting a different strategy. China changed its position in response to pressure, saying that it “opposes and condemns acts that harm civilians,” though it refrained from specifically denouncing Hamas.<sup>74</sup> In a phone call, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi informed his Saudi counterpart that "Israel's actions have gone beyond the scope of self-defense."<sup>75</sup>

On the international stage, to achieve a "comprehensive, just, and lasting" settlement of the Palestinian issue, China called on the UN Security Council to develop a "concrete" timeline and roadmap for a two-

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Ewe, Koh. “How China Could Play a Key Role in the Israel-Hamas War—and Why It’s Not.” TIME, October 18, 2023. <https://time.com/6325352/china-israel-hamas-war/>.

<sup>75</sup> “Chinese, Saudi Arabian FMs Hold Phone Talks on Palestinian-Israeli Conflict,” n.d. <https://english.news.cn/20231015/fbceeb84a1e5401283c127ac9425dd50/c.html>.

state solution.<sup>76</sup> Earlier, China was also one of four countries that voted in favor of a Russian-drafted U.N. Security Council resolution urging a humanitarian ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war—which was rejected for its failure to denounce Hamas’ surprise attack on Israel.<sup>77</sup> This conflict poses a grave threat to Chinese interests, as economic investments of China are at stake, and if this conflict continues then it can either lead to its close partner Iran indirectly getting involved in the conflict or cost its BRI project. With this, China's recent backing of Russia's war in Ukraine demonstrates just how expensive involvement in an extended conflict can be. Due to the crisis in Ukraine, China's economic crisis has gotten worse, imports of vital supplies have been disrupted, and the global economy—including that of the debt-ridden nations along China's Belt and Road—has slowed down.<sup>78</sup>

Although it was anticipated that China would play a crucial role in the region, its involvement in this conflict has been minimal. Nonetheless, this dispute illustrates the diminished bargaining power of China at the negotiating table. China played a key role in mediating the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia due to the substantial reliance of Saudi Arabia on China to accomplish its economic transformation objectives. However, China does not hold the same degree of power as Israel, which the US continues to firmly support.<sup>79</sup> But overall, this approach of China shows its change in policy towards Israel. It illustrates the Chinese government's growing propensity to take advantage of international conflicts as a means of undermining the US and gaining ground in the "Global South." However, this approach can backfire as

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<sup>76</sup> Writer, Staff. “China Proposes U.N. Security Council Action over Israel-Hamas War.” *Nikkei Asia*, November 30, 2023. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Israel-Hamas-war/China-proposes-U.N.-Security-Council-action-over-Israel-Hamas-war>.

<sup>77</sup> UN News. “Security Council Rejects Russian Resolution on Gaza,” October 18, 2023. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142427>.

<sup>78</sup> Ewe, Koh. “How China Could Play a Key Role in the Israel-Hamas War—and Why It’s Not.” *TIME*, October 18, 2023. <https://time.com/6325352/china-israel-hamas-war/>.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*

Beijing may find it more difficult to project impartiality in other regional conflicts if it uses the current crisis as an opportunity to poke fun at Washington.<sup>80</sup>

Lastly, it is difficult to predict yet whether China can play a particular role in this conflict as its control over Iran on this issue will also be tested. As, with Iran's foreign minister announcing that a "pre-emptive attack" may occur as soon as "the coming few hours," Iran already looks ready to intensify the conflict should Israel proceed with a ground invasion of Gaza.<sup>81</sup>

## Conclusion

To summarize, the Israel-Hamas conflict is a complex geopolitical riddle with far-reaching effects on the surrounding area and beyond. Different factions have emerged as a result of the involvement of outside powers, each pursuing different objectives and tactics.

The US is unwavering in its support of Israel, providing crucial military, diplomatic, and humanitarian assistance. Its influence in the conflict is demonstrated by its role in mediating between Israel and Hamas, as demonstrated in the recent hostage negotiations. To stop further escalation, the United States must delicately strike a balance between diplomatic engagement and support for its ally.

Iran, Israel's longtime foe, actively supports Hamas, which could intensify the conflict. The situation is further complicated by the substantial financial support Iran gives to Hamas and its regional proxies. Fears of broader regional destabilization are raised by the rhetoric of Iranian officials and reports of increased funding.

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<sup>80</sup> The Washington Institute. "Why China Is Taking Sides Against Israel—and Why It Will Likely Backfire," n.d. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/why-china-taking-sides-against-israel-and-why-it-will-likely-backfire>.

<sup>81</sup> Ewe, Koh. "How China Could Play a Key Role in the Israel-Hamas War—and Why It's Not." TIME, October 18, 2023. <https://time.com/6325352/china-israel-hamas-war/>.

Gulf states strive to maintain stability particularly those that are normalizing relations with Israel. Their influence is critical in facilitating diplomatic resolutions and preventing further escalation. Different viewpoints within the Gulf, however, as evidenced by some influencers' pro-Israel stance, draw attention to the complex dynamics at work.

Turkey has played a significant role in the conflict, with President Erdogan taking a firmly anti-Israel stand. Although Turkey has the capacity to act as a mediator, diplomatic attempts may be hampered by its present biased stance and provocative language. The difficult task of balancing regional dynamics is highlighted by the tense relations between Israel and Turkey, which resulted in the recall of ambassadors.

China, a rising force in the Middle East, will encounter challenges in effectively handling the crisis. Its changing position, which at first called for moderation before voicing worries about harm to civilians, illustrates the delicate balance it must strike. China faces many challenges in the region, as seen by its limited involvement in the conflict's mediation, especially in light of its economic interests.

Nearby neighbors such as Egypt, Jordan, and Syria are confronted with the dual challenge of managing both internal issues and regional stability. While Jordan demonstrates its desire for a peaceful resolution through its diplomatic efforts at the UN, Egypt demonstrates its commitment to stability by facilitating humanitarian aid. Despite its complicated past with Hamas, Syria still has the potential to destabilize the region if its proxies get involved.

Essentially, a global collaborative effort is required to mediate and address humanitarian concerns arising from the Israel-Hamas conflict. The intricate network of alliances, rivalries, and geopolitical interests forming the Middle East demands a collaborative and nuanced international strategy in order to achieve an acceptable resolution.. The need for diplomatic efforts and humanitarian assistance to lessen the death toll and work toward a durable peace in the area is made clear by the violence that is still on going.



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