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A Critical Assessment of Israel-Hamas War in the Israel-Palestine Conflict

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Abstract

At dawn on Saturday, October 7, 2023, the Hamas militant Palestinian group, that controlled the Gaza Strip since 2007, launched dastardly surprise attacks on Israel. It was the deadliest attack on the State of Israel since its War of Independence in 1948 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973. This paper critically examined the Hamas phenomenon in the war and the possibility of achieving a Palestinian State, not by war but by diplomatic engagement of all stakeholders. The theory of Fourth Generation Warfare is adopted to understand the situation better in the Israel-Palestine conflict, and particularly the Hamas war strategy. The study adopted a qualitative research approach for an in-depth exploration of perspectives, experiences, and narratives related to the conflict. It gathered data from documentaries, articles from learned journals, the mediascape, government official statements and websites, to capture the diverse viewpoints and narratives surrounding the conflict and war. The international media watch has tracked the battlefield exchanges (reports) and diplomatic shuttles between major stakeholders' capitals. The Gaza Strip enclave has suffered monumental destruction and a horrific humanitarian catastrophe. Ceasefire had met with stiff opposition from the combatants. The conclusion is that Palestinian struggles for statehood since 1948 had hardly led them to achieve their goal. Given the generational historicity of the conflict, it is hard to decipher whether war or diplomacy would eventually bring about peace. But efforts must be continued on the diplomatic channels to manage the conflict.

Keywords: Israel-Hamas War, Israel-Palestine Conflict, Hamas phenomenon, Palestinian State, Diplomatic channels.

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Background to the Conflict

On Saturday, October 7, 2023, before 5 a.m., the Al Jazeera network channel was on flashing ‘Breaking News’. At about 6:35 a.m. the Al Jazeera *effect* was already unfolding the event, with the first siren warning of incoming rockets to central and southern Israel. This was the start of Hamas’s firing thousands of rockets at Israel, striking even major cities like Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The slaughter spree that took place within 24 hours was described as the most deadly day in Israel and the largest mass murder of Jews since the Holocaust (1941-1945) and statehood in 1948 (HOLOCAUST MUSEUM LA, 2023). The attacks came, resulting from a build-up of several months and years of running violent struggles among Palestinian militant groups, especially between Hamas and Fatah on one hand, and the Palestinians and Israelis, on the other. In all Palestinian struggles, some by violent attacks, others at international peace talks, Hamas had adopted a war strategy to obliterate Israel and establish a Palestinian state in its place. Since October 7, 2023, the Hamas attacks were a culmination of years of conflicts between Israel and Palestine. The Hamas attacks and Israel’s retaliatory response resulted in the Israel-Hamas War, with massive bombardments of the Gaza enclave. The immediate cause of the current attacks and the ensuing war, according to Hamas, was the long-building hatred over Israeli policy, which included the uprisings of ‘violence at the Al-Aqsa Mosque’ in Jerusalem, but more importantly over ‘the treatment of Palestinians and the expansion of Israeli settlements’ (Reals & D’Agata, 2023). Indeed, the conflict between Israelis and Philistines spans millennia, not just an issue of recent history, over land ownership and other territorial claims. Who is occupying whose land space, or who does have the right of existence, and the other does not? These questions have defied answers over time, which, if unanswered, will continue to perpetuate the conflict.

Theoretical Framework

There are several theories of conflict and war in international relations. Empirically, we endeavour to understand what war involves, its causes, the fighters, and how to deplore diplomacy to end war. Traditional International Relations theories focus on international systems – system-level war theory; the State [state-level war theory], and the character of individual leaders (Sjoberg, 2017). These levels of analysis are easily comprehensible when dealing with sovereign states within the international system. However, it becomes rather conflated when dealing with state and non-state actors at war, as in the case between Israel and Hamas. This has been generally characterized as ‘irregular warfare.’ The United States Department of Defense (DoD) defines irregular warfare as “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s)” (Ucko & Marks, 2022). This definition may be inadequate to describe the kind of warfare between Israel and Hamas

because it has gone beyond a violent struggle, yet it is over a relevant population – the Palestinian people. It is an all-out war that can best be described as ‘urban warfare’. In other words, an irregular warfare in an urban setting – the Gaza coastal cities.

One of the most relevant theories to explain irregular warfare in the context of the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza is the Fourth Generation Warfare theory (4GW). Fourth Generation Warfare theory describes a new form of warfare that involves non-state actors, such as insurgent groups or terrorist organizations, engaging in asymmetric warfare against state actors. In this type of warfare, the lines between combatants and non-combatants are blurred, and the use of unconventional tactics and strategies is common. The theory was initially proposed by a group of military theorists and analysts, including William S. Lind, Keith Nightengale, John F. Schmitt, Joseph W. Sutton, and Gary I. Wilson (Lind et. al, 1989).² The concept was first advanced in the late 1980s and gained prominence in the 1990s as a response to the changing nature of warfare. The key propositions of Fourth Generation Warfare include: Non-state actors play a significant role in modern conflicts; Asymmetric tactics and strategies are used by non-state actors to challenge state actors with superior conventional military capabilities; The distinction between combatants and non-combatants is blurred, leading to increased civilian casualties and ethical dilemmas; Information warfare, propaganda, and psychological operations are crucial components of warfare; and winning the hearts and minds of the local population is essential for success in irregular warfare.

According to the theory, the driving factor in identifying the fourth generation was the idea that whoever was able to adapt to it first would gain a decisive advantage. The fourth generation's key drivers of conflict are the states losing their monopoly on war with non-state actors fighting states, the universal crisis of the legitimacy of the state, and the growing differences in culture, conceived as multiculturalism (Ataman, 2003).³ One of the key texts that introduced and elaborated on the concept of Fourth Generation Warfare is "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation" by Lind et. al (1989), which serves as a foundational work in the development of the theory of Fourth Generation Warfare and provides insights into the changing nature of conflict in the modern world.

In the context of the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza, the theory of Fourth Generation Warfare helps explain how Hamas, a non-state actor, has been able to challenge Israel, a state actor, through asymmetric tactics and strategies. Hamas has utilized suicide bombings, rocket attacks, guerrilla warfare, and other unconventional methods to target Israeli military forces and civilians. These

² Lind, W. S., Nightengale, K., Schmitt, J. F., Sutton, J. W., & Wilson, G. I. (1989). *The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation*. Marine Corps Gazette, 73(10), 22-26.

³ Ataman, M. (2003). Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations, 2(1), Fall.

tactics have created challenges for the Israeli military, which is trained and equipped for conventional warfare. Hamas has also used propaganda, media campaigns, and information warfare to shape international perceptions of the conflict and gain support for its cause. By leveraging these aspects of Fourth Generation Warfare, Hamas has been able to sustain its resistance against Israel despite facing overwhelming military power. In all, the theory provides a framework for understanding the complexities of irregular warfare in conflicts like the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

The Hamas Phenomenon

In the early 1970s, an activist, Sheik Ahmad Yassin formed what he called *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Resistance Movement), popularly known by its Arabic acronym Hamas, meaning ‘zeal’. It began by operating clinics, schools and charities in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. But in the heat of the first Palestinian uprising (*Intifada*), Hamas was formally founded in December 1987 at the instance of Sheik Ahmad Yassin ([aljazeera.com/gallery/...](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/...) October 11, 2023).

The Hamas 1988 Charter, or Covenant, comprised 36 Articles, for the total liberation of Palestine, with the obliteration and non-existence of Israel. Some excerpts of the 36 Articles are cited *in alia*:: “Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it.” Article 13 states: “[Peace] initiatives, and so-called peaceful solutions and international conferences are in contradiction to the principles of the Islamic Resistance Movement... Those conferences are no more than a means to appoint the infidels as arbitrators in the lands of Islam... There is no solution for the Palestinian problem except by Jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are but a waste of time, an exercise in futility”. And Article 7, declares: “The Day of Judgment will not come about until Moslems fight Jews and kill them. Then, the Jews will hide behind rocks and trees, and the rocks and trees will cry out: ‘O Moslem, a Jew is hiding behind me, come and kill him.’” In Article 6, The Islamic Resistance Movement described itself by its allegiance as “a distinguished Palestinian movement, whose allegiance is to Allah, and whose way of life is Islam. It strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine” (Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008).

The Hamas phenomenon, from its origin, referred to the political and military organization known as Hamas, which primarily operates in the Palestinian territories, an offshoot of the First Palestinian Intifada (revolt) in 1987. But over time, the Hamas phenomenon could be aptly described as its *modus operandi* with the use of violent attacks and utter rejection of any diplomatic engagement with its sworn enemy, the Nation of Israel. The group's military wing, the Izz ad-

Din al-Qassam Brigades,⁴ Has been actively involved in numerous acts of violence against Israeli targets, including suicide bombings and rocket attacks. As a result of its horrendous practice, Hamas has a complicated relationship with the international community. It is designated as a terrorist organization by several countries, including the United States, Israel, and the European Union, due to its violent tactics (cfr.org, October 31, 2023). Other countries, however, particularly those in the Arab and Muslim world, recognize Hamas as a legitimate resistance movement, dedicated to fighting against Israeli rule. Hamas' sudden gruesome attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023, triggered Israel's reprisal bombardments of Gaza and a full-blown war. Since Hamas' avowed goal is the obliteration of Israel in the ensued war, Israel has equally vowed to eliminate Hamas. However, some pundits have argued that to "eliminate Hamas," is unrealistic. This is because Hamas is an "extreme Islamic ideology, a set of ideas" that include "total refusal to accept a Jewish state right alongside its own." This ingrained fundamentalist ideology, it is believed, "cannot be wiped out" (time.com, October 28, 2023). Israel has been involved in sporadic violence with Hamas, since the latter assumed Palestinian governance in Gaza, in 2006. Some of these significant armed conflicts occurred in 2008, 2012, 2014, 2021 and 2023 (History.com Editors, 2023). This latest one, which began on October 7, 2023, is about the most prolonged and massively destructive on human and material infrastructure of the Gaza coastal enclave.

The Hamas' political bureau chief, Ghazi Hamad said in an October 24, 2023 show on LBC TV (Lebanon), that "Hamas is prepared to repeat the October 7 'Al-Aqsa Flood' Operation time and again until Israel is annihilated" (memri.org, November 1, 2023). If Israel is widely accused of committing genocidal crimes against the Hamas and Palestinians in Gaza, what did Hamas commit against Israel on October 7, 2023, and vowed to repeat over and over again? It is assumed that genocide can be committed in several ways, one of which is by 'intent,' which is quite explicit in the Hamas Covenant.

Why Israel Was Caught Off-guard

The Hamas attack on Israel was severally termed a "surprise attack," which is suggestive of "a massive intelligence failure," as the Israeli government appeared caught off-guard by the infiltration of Hamas fighters across the southern border and the launch of thousands of rockets (cnbc.com, 2023). Over time, since its creation as a sovereign nation in 1948, Israel has developed itself to the status of the First World country. With its ingenuity in technological development, its intelligence and security network are considered one of the most sophisticated in the world. For the enemy at the door to strike with such ferocity, without the

⁴Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, meaning 'Battalions of the martyr Izz ad-Din al-Qassam' name after Izz ad-Din al-Qassam' as a religious and resistance hero. <https://justvision.org/glossary/izz-ad-din-al-qassam>. Accessed November 6, 2023.

slightest eavesdrop about it, for months the operation was being planned, was a catastrophic, a tragedy of monumental proportions. Quite honestly, Israel's Chief of Military Intelligence, Major-General Aharon Haliva, admitted responsibility for the failure to track Hamas's untold attack. On October 17, 2023, General Haliva circulated a memo among the ranks, acknowledging the corps' failures, and accepted full responsibility for what went wrong (Sky News, October 17, 2023).

Israel was caught off-guard for certain reasons than just complacent reliance on its technological prowess. These were the internal political divisions, religious observance, and the growing licentiousness within the nation's social fabric. First, the internal political divisions which followed the formation of a coalition with several far-right parties in the aftermath of the 2022 Israel elections. This coalition of political forces bolstered the Netanyahu government to embark on judicial reforms but triggered protests against and demonstrations in support (ajc.org, 2023). The widespread protests against the government across Israel, even infected the defence forces, running for some nine (9) months. Senior current and former military chiefs of IDF warned of the grave repercussions of the passage of such legislation. They noted the thousands of "reserve soldiers" who have threatened to boycott duty (aljazeera.com/news/...July 24, 2023). Of course, such a threat would mean potential danger to national security, especially for a nation virtually encircled by hostile neighbours.

However, while some threatened to boycott their military duties, others remained patriotic to the nation. For Yossi Kuperwasser, former head of Israel's military intelligence division and security expert, he was convinced that reservist protesters have crossed a "red line" by "using their army service as a political tool". In the circle of rival petitions, over 75,000 signatures in the name of reserve soldiers against those who have refused to report for duty (Freedman, 2023). Major Rafi Laderman, another reserve soldier said: "My commitment exceeds any politically-disputed situation ... [service] is a sacred duty for every person who lives in Israel." For Laderman, most Israelis expect that if push comes to shove, "99.9 per cent of those saying they are not interested in [reserve duty] ... will fight in an emergency situation" (Freedman, 2023). Given these patriotic voices among the reservists, despite political wranglings, the military was not totally in disarray but morale dampened to a degree. However, as the Hamas attack jolted the nation from its slumber, the political class united and formed a War Cabinet and some 360,000 reservists heeded the clarion call to duty (Anadolu Agency, 2023).

The second factor was the Religious Observance. Israel is a nation founded and born of God, the first guiding light to the One True and Living God. From its foundation as a nation, holy practices were instituted to be observed. Two of such holy orders, the Sabbath and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), were being

observed on October 7, 2023, when Israel was attacked (Religion Unplugged, October 7, 2023). As a rule, the observances required that the people refrain from work—a holiday (History.com Editors, September 26, 2023). The holiday mood pervaded the nation on October 7, as it did on October 6, 1973.

In contradiction to the holy observance and as a chosen nation, the third factor was the growing licentiousness within the nation’s social fabric. There has been a trending modern culture in Israel to glamorize homosexuality. On Jun 1, 2023, thousands of people marched in what was tagged ‘Jerusalem’s Pride parade’ (PBS, 2023). The 'Jerusalem Pride Parade' is what has become an annual celebration of the divergent LGBTQ⁵ Community in the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is acclaimed as a holy city and the residents are also believed to be holy; and, even some pundits argue that the holy includes ‘those who fall outside of the expected norms of a religious city.’ According to them, “The boys marching with rainbow kippot and the girls dancing hand in hand...are holy. The families with young children who are showing them what it means to be inclusive, accepting, and loving – they are holy” (SILKOFF, 2023).

Here, we are confronted with the difficulty of conceptualizing or operationalizing what can be termed “holy.” For humans, a term may be defined in a relative sense and as such we do not find it offensive. But that would not pass the test from God’s perspective, among those who profess that God is. For Israel, God is and such relations must be conducted on His terms. How many Israelis and their leaders still believe that God is holy and that righteousness exalts a nation?⁶ Under the Levitical Order, the people of Israel were also commanded: "You must be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy."⁷ Still by this Order, “Homosexuality is absolutely forbidden, for it is an enormous sin...a terrible perversion.”⁸ The penalty for disobedience to these ordinances is, partly, that the Lord will punish them with “sudden terrors and panic...” and “you will flee before your attackers; and those who hate you will rule you....”⁹

There have been at least four Israel dispersals, as punishment, notably the Babylonian; the Persian; the Greek; and the Roman dispersals. Sin, an act of disobedience against God’s power and holiness, had been responsible for Israel’s dispersions, and as punishment, in all the aforementioned cases in the past. And can also be occasioned in modern times; and the punishment can take diverse forms. The October 7 attacks may not be taken in isolation and prolongation of the war that ensued.

⁵ The acronym LGBTQ refers to the community of people that are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer.

⁶ Proverbs 14:34.

⁷ Leviticus 19:1.

⁸ Leviticus 1:22.

⁹ Leviticus 26: 14-35.

Israel-Hamas War

In the aftermath of the Hamas surprise attacks on October 7, 2023, Israel embarked on retaliatory bombardment of the Hamas enclave in the Gaza Strip. As of June 10, 2024, the consequent Hamas-Israel War had claimed over 37,000 Palestinian lives, according to the Hamas' Gaza Health Ministry; while the Israeli death toll topped 1,200, according to official figures, and some 250 Israelis and other nationals were taken hostage by Hamas (The Associated Press, 2024). Even though casualty figures are subject to disputation, but that the war had caused thousands of deaths and injuries, with massive displacement and destruction is undisputable. As the war was taking a heavier toll on the Palestinian side, especially in Gaza, many states in the region and around the world started calling for a UN-mediated ceasefire.

However, three weeks into the war, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said the war has entered its “second stage.” This, he characterized as “Israel's second War of Independence,” which would be “long and tough” (i24NEWS, October 28, 2023). This would mean a non-quick-dash victory as in previous wars. This would also portend a spillover effect, which may drag other state and non-state actors into the war. When the war entered its third month, it became obvious, that Israel was already fighting on multiple fronts, as Hamas has sworn to Israel's destruction, backed by Iran and Qatar. Other Iranian-sponsored militant groups—the Houthis and Hezbollah--have hit U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria, and attacked Israel from Lebanon, in what they called “revenge” for Israel's avowed “attempt to eliminate” Hamas, and solidarity with the Palestinians (reuters.com, January 6, 2024).

It was in this sense that Israel was already responding to attacks from Hezbollah, with 100,000 fighters, in Lebanon, from Israel's northern axis (Reuters.com, October 17, 2023). Similarly, from the Syria territory, several mortar attacks were launched on northern Israel, to which Israel responded with artillery that struck airports in Damascus and Aleppo (washingtonpost.com, October 11, 2023). Also, on Monday, October 30, 2023, Yemen's Houthi Islamic militia fired ballistic and cruise missiles at northern Israel, in solidarity with Hamas. The attack, according to Bruce Riedel [former analyst on Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)], marked the first time ballistic missiles were to have been launched at Israel since Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, fired Scud missiles at Israel in 1991 Gulf War (theintercept.com, November 2, 2023). Hamas (Gaza), Hezbollah (Lebanon), and Houthis (Yemen) are Iran-sponsored Islamic jihadist groups, and the attacks from Lebanon, Syria and Yemen heighten the fear that the conflict between Israel and Hamas could spiral into a regional war in the Middle East.

UN Attempts on Ceasefire

On June 8, 2024, the Israel-Hamas War entered its eight (8) months from October 7, 2023. For eight months running, many countries, groups and individuals called for a ceasefire. In response, within a couple of months of the war, the UN scribe, Antonio Guterres was compelled to evoke Article 99 of the UN Charter which provides that: "The Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter, which, in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security." It is intended to raise the alarm to prevent a brewing crisis from spiralling out of control, engulfing the region and, indeed, the entire world. The resolution was passed by 13 votes in favour, 1 abstention and 1 veto (apnews.com, December 9, 2023).

While the United States vetoed the resolution, the United Kingdom mission abstained. Explanations for both the veto and abstention rhymed in that the U.N Security Council resolution on a Gaza cease-fire was not successful because it "failed to condemn the terror group Hamas" and "lacked reality" of the intents of the combatants on the ground (NBC News, December 8, 2023). Indeed, the UN resolution failed to pass not only because it failed to condemn the terror group Hamas but also the jihadist group's determination to repeat the October 7 operation again and again. What this would mean is that a pause in fighting would be for Hamas planning further attacks on Israel (TIME, December 9, 2023). This the framers of the resolution refused to acknowledge, but which the US could not ignore.

For objectivity, therefore, a balanced resolution for a ceasefire would have been such that rein on Hamas to rescind its avowed determination to repeat its October 7 operation over and again. On the other side, Israel should be made to end its military operations in Gaza. However, given the track record of UN-ceasefire resolutions, if the December 8, 2023, Gaza ceasefire resolution had passed without veto, there was no guarantee it would be obeyed by parties in the war. For instance, in the Syrian War (2011 – 2023), the UN Security Council passed 18 ceasefire resolutions, in 5 different areas of combat, between 2012 and early 2018, and all were broken by the Assad regime [Russian-supported] (New Atlanticist, March 9, 2018). Therefore, if the US had not vetoed or the UK abstention, it was doubtful if the ceasefire would have held, given the obstinacy of the combatants.

Still, diplomatic efforts continued to bring the war to an end, with ceasefire negotiations mediated by Qatar, Egypt, and the United States. On Monday, June 10, 2024, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution, endorsing a United States-drafted ceasefire proposal, that aimed to end the eight-month Israel-Hams war in Gaza. The votes on the US-sponsored resolution were 14-0, in which Russia abstained (Al Jazeera, 2024). As this round of UNSC ceasefire resolution

was being adopted in New York, the US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken was on ground in the Middle East. It was Mr. Blinken's seventh diplomatic shuttle to the frontline since the war began, to persuade both Israel and Hamas to accept the ceasefire deal.

This is a three-phase ceasefire plan, as announced by President Biden on May 31, 2024. In the resolution:

- Phase one required the safe distribution of humanitarian assistance at a scale throughout the Gaza Strip which Biden said 'would lead to 600 trucks with aid entering Gaza every day.'
- Phase two of the resolution required the agreement of Israel and Hamas, for "a permanent end to hostilities, in exchange for the release of all other hostages still in Gaza, and a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza." And,
- In phase three, there would be a launch of a "major multi-year reconstruction plan for Gaza" and "the return of the remains of any deceased hostages still in Gaza to their families" (UN NEWS, 2024).

While the UN resolution contains some positive provisions, the implementation would be a hard task, both for the mediators and the combatants. First, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had earlier said that President Biden presented only some parts of the proposal. The Prime Minister insisted that 'any talk of a permanent ceasefire before dismantling Hamas's military and governing capabilities was a non-starter.' Second, Hamas also insisted that 'any deal must lead to a permanent ceasefire, a full Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, an end to the Israeli siege of Gaza....' (Al Jazeera, 2024). Hence, the hardline posture of the combatants would hardly lead to the much-anticipated ceasefire and a quick end to the war. Nonetheless, the resolution provides that "if the negotiations take longer than six weeks for phase one, the ceasefire will still continue as long as negotiations continue." But no real ceasefire had gone into effect. Nonetheless, diplomacy will not cease, whether or not there is a ceasefire. But a ceasefire would be in the interest all concerned, if both sides would agree.

Israel's Victory or Hamas'?

Being caught off guard is enough to suffer an overwhelming defeat at the hands of surprise attackers. On the contrary, however, for Israel, it has always been an overwhelming victory as demonstrated in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973 attacks and consequent wars. In the 1967 War, for instance, Israel's victory left it in control of territories four-fold its previous size (History.com Editors, August 16, 2023). Similarly, the Egyptian and Syrian coordinated surprise attacks on Israel on October 6, 1973, which led to Israel's capture of more territories, notably the

Golan Heights from Syria (History.com Editors). And by October 25, 1973, a UN-brokered ceasefire came into effect.

Nonetheless, the Hamas successful surprise and gruesome attack on October 7, 2023, was good in Israel's favour, from another perspective. It was good that Hamas successfully carried out the attacks and showed the world how brutally serious they could be and carted away humans and equipment as their booties. It was good that Hamas planned and successfully executed the attack with neither the Israeli nor American intelligence network taking any pre-emptive action. If the intelligence community had the slightest inkling of the imminent attack, Israel would probably have launched a pre-emptive attack on Hamas. In such circumstances, Israel would have been condemned as the aggressor, much more than the barrage of condemnation the nation had been smeared with.

As it was widely alleged, it is unimaginable to assume that IDF would carry out intentional attacks on hospitals, schools, and refugee camps without the shadow of Hamas lurking within, either above or beneath such places. It is also difficult to be too careful in war situations without suffering from collateral damage, especially in urban and irregular warfare. One of the major reasons why it was difficult to achieve an immediate ceasefire was due to the intransigence of both sides. Israel insisted that Hamas must 'release the hostages first', while Hamas said it would 'not free them or stop fighting while Gaza is under assault' (Reuters, November 6, 2023).

But what brought Gaza under assault? Overtly, it was Hamas' assault on Israel on October 7, 2023, and its unwavering determination to repeat the assault again and again. According to a Hamas official, Ghazi Hamad, "Hamas is prepared to repeat the October 7 'Al-Aqsa Flood' Operation time and again until Israel is annihilated." "The Al-Aqsa Flood Is Just the First Time, And There Will Be A Second, Third, And Fourth...." And he concluded: "Everything we do is justified" (memri.org, November 1, 2023). Hamad was voicing these incendiary statements as the United Nations leaders were calling for a ceasefire, mounting pressure on Israel in particular. However, the Israeli leadership was under no illusion that an immediate and complete ceasefire would mean an opportunity for Hamas to re-strategize and repeat their attack as they vowed (Reuters.com, November 4, 2023). The imbalanced pressure in the call for a ceasefire made it difficult for the international community to initiate and enforce an immediate ceasefire in the war.

As Hamas has justified its position to annihilate Israel, likewise Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas' capability. However, some security experts, like Yossi Melman and Dan Raviv, argue that Israel's determination to "eliminate Hamas," is unrealistic. They argue that Hamas is an "extreme Islamic ideology, a set of ideas," which include absolute rejection of a Jewish state's right to exist, which "cannot be wiped out" (Melman & Raviv, 2023). However, destroying Hamas

would mean, first the destruction of their military infrastructure, and, second rendering them unable to hold and govern territory. The unprecedented displacements and destructions within eight months have led many geopolitical experts to question when the conflict will end anytime soon and, ultimately, whether peace can ever be achieved between the sworn enemies. Relative peace can be achieved between Israelis and Palestinians but not on Hamas terms.

However, Hamas hostage-holding has been raised high as a trump card, a bargaining chip in their hands, to hand-twist Israel, which has elicited emotions from the family members of the hostages and humanitarian organizations to mount pressure on Israel. With this pressure at home and abroad, even from Israel's closest allies, the US in particular, Israel is portrayed as a villain in the war. This is the kind of 'psychological warfare' they are waging over the fate of the hostages, and their exposure to political and military leadership's precarious situation. This has engendered so deep "a sense of hopelessness and vulnerability in the rest of Israel as to destroy the nation from within (Horovitz, 2023). Nevertheless, it is highly unlikely that Hamas would be able to produce all the hostages alive, which could create a breakdown of negotiation and continuation of the war. And as the war is prolonged it may end without assured victory, either way—for Israel or Hamas. However, Israel's victory is largely dependent on providence as it has ever been.

The dependence on Israel's victory is predicated on the eternality and immutability of the providential, as encapsulated in the Davidic Covenant. The Covenant declared in part: "I will love him and be kind to him forever; *MY COVENANT with him will never end...as endless as the days of heaven. But if his descendants forsake my instructions and fail to obey my regulations, if they do not obey my decrees and fail to keep my commands, then I will punish their sin with the rod, and their disobedience with beating. But I will never stop loving him, nor fail to keep my promise to him. *NO, I WILL NOT BREAK MY COVENANT*; I will not take back a single word I said.: It will be as eternal as the moon, my faithful witness in the sky!" (biblegateway.com/...NLT, 2015).¹⁰*

For the emphasis, as already alluded to, sin had led Israel to exile and captivity in the past, as punishment. God allowed their enemies to have the upper hand. In some of the instances, the Babylonian captivity took place as predicted by Jeremiah, who was labelled a 'traitor.' The Jews suffered catastrophes under Emperor Nero, in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70AD. Jesus predicted it and it happened; He did not prevent it from happening. The Holocaust was masterminded by the German Chancellor Adolf Hitler and his collaborators between 1939-1942, in which some 6 million Jews were slaughtered; no power could prevent it from execution. These are some instances of God's punishment,

¹⁰ Psalm 89:27-37, *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. By permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.,

inferentially. But the *Covenant* remains ever constant, as the sun and the moon; that Israel remains indestructible.

Reality of Achieving a Palestinian State

The Palestine National Council made the Declaration of Independence of Palestine State on 15 November 1988 (UNITED NATIONS: The Question of Palestine, n.d). Since July 2019, many countries have declared their support and recognition for a Palestinian state, made up of 138 of the 193 UN member states. Also, since November 29, 2012, Palestine gained a non-member observer state status by the UN General Assembly Resolution 67/19 (refworld.org, 2012). And, on Friday, May 10, 2024, the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution titled: "Admission of New Members to the United Nations" (document A/ES-10/L.30/Rev.1)¹¹ By a recorded vote of 143 in favour to 9 against and 25 abstentions (United Nations: Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 2024). By this resolution, the State of Palestine is qualified for membership in the UN in accordance with Article 4 of its Charter. Therefore, the State of Palestine is admittedly a member state of the UN, only awaiting formal ratification by the UN Security Council.

But what has been delaying the Palestine sovereign statehood, thus far? From every intent and purpose, Hamas's approach is one major hindrance to the actualization of a Palestinian State, to coexist with Israel in peace and security. Apart from carrying out deadly attacks, Hamas also engrained in its Charter, Article 13, that peace initiatives, and "so-called peaceful solutions and international conferences are in contradiction to the principles of the Islamic Resistance Movement... Those conferences are no more than a means to appoint the infidels as arbitrators in the lands of Islam... There is no solution for the Palestinian problem except by Jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are but a waste of time, an exercise in futility." In essence., the IRM (otherwise called Hamas) has separated itself from any partnership for peaceful solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. On the other hand, what are considered Israeli "atrocities" in the Gaza, and West Bank (Judea and Samaria) are in defence of her very existence which Hamas and other Islamist jihadists are fighting to obliterate.

In Ajinde Oluwashakin's "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: What Is Hindering the Birth of the State of Palestine" (Oluwashakin, 2019), it is argued that the non-recognition and non-acceptance of Israel's right of existence by Palestinians is a major hindrance to Palestinian statehood. However, Carl Goldberg, in his criticism of Ajinde's viewpoint asserts, in part, that:

¹¹ <https://press.un.org/en/2024/ga12599.doc.htm>. Accessed June 17, 2024.

The conflict over Israel is not an "Israeli-Palestinian" conflict. In essence, we are dealing with an Islamic-Jewish conflict, just like the Hamas Covenant says it is. How else to explain the fact that Israel's deadliest enemy is the very non-Arab, non-Palestinian ISLAMIC Republic of Iran? Obviously, it is Israel's desire to continue to exist that is hindering the birth of the state of Palestine because "Palestine" is defined by both Hamas and Fatah as the entire territory of the former British Palestine Mandate, and this obviously excludes Israel (Goldberg, 2024).

Goldberg further affirmed that the name, or rather the idea,

‘Israeli-Palestinian Conflict’ is a great distortion of reality because it cannot explain the Hamas Covenant or the fact that Israel's deadliest enemy is the Islamic Republic of Iran and its protege Hezbollah. In essence, the conflict is an Islamic war on the Jews just like the Hamas Covenant says it is (Goldberg, 2024).

It is obvious, from the above quotes that the long-held narrative of 'The Israel-Palestine conflict' within the larger 'Arab-Israel conflict' is changing or has changed.

But unwittingly, Hamas made a grave mistake to have ignited this war on October 7. Their strategic and tactical calculus was code-named “Operation Al-Aqsa Flood,” thinking that would galvanize the entire Islamic and Arab world to their side. To this end, arguably, was the Iranian massive barrage of attacks on Israel with over 300 missiles and drones on April 14, 2024. The massive attack comprised of 170 drones and 30cruise missiles and some 110 ballistic missiles (BBC News, 2024). Although the Iranian attack was in response to an apparent Israeli strike on Iran’s embassy compound in Syria on April 1, 2024, that killed 12 people, including two Iranian Generals. Nonetheless, such was in Hamas calculation, which they expected from the Arab and Islamic world, which, of course, did not materialize. Instead, the Iranian attack was thwarted by the coordinated efforts of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States and Israel’s defence mechanisms. The Arab State's unexpected "cooperation against Iran" in defence of Israel remains a puzzle (Bradley, 2024). Neither Iran nor Hamas expected such cooperation from any Arab state. In ancient times the weapons were bows and arrows, swords and javelins, horses and chariots, and the like. But today, they are rockets, missiles, drones, and the like; all hulled against Israel, but the Defender remains ever constant, yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Conclusion

The conflict and war between the Israelis and Palestinians are long-drawn, in particular, with the Hamas phenomenon. To move forward meaningfully to achieve a state of Palestine, both sides must have mutual recognition of each other's right to existence. To achieve this, it behoves Hamas's policy of obliteration to undergo a surgical change. As a Sunni leader, Mowlavi Abdolhamid, has rightly affirmed, "The reality is that neither Muslims can destroy Israel, nor Israel can eliminate Palestinians. It is not achievable. When something is not achievable, why use force?" (iranintl.com, October 14, 2023). Interestingly, Hamas is Sunni as the Iranian cleric Abdolhamid. Sadly, however, Hamas has invoked militant interpretations of Islam to spearhead a Sunni extremist movement committed to destroying Israel. It is also worthy to mention the diplomatic role Qatar has played since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war; a commendable posture, even though Qatar has been a staunch Hamas ally, next to Iran. Contrarywise, Qatar assumed a diplomatic clout that has profoundly helped to contain the war, with diplomatic engagements with Egypt and the United States. The ultimate resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the role Hamas plays in it will depend on political negotiations and the aspirations of the Palestinian people themselves. There is general support for an eventual 'two-state solution,' when the war ends, and the reconstruction of Gaza. However, a battlefield solution may be their goal on both sides. Clearly, as the Palestinians, with the Hamas strategy, have not been able to achieve statehood by surprise violent attacks since 1948, it thus, logically, follows that the use of force must give way to resilient diplomacy in the management of the conflict.

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