
Regional Dynamics and Global Implications of the War in Gaza

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to analyze the key consequences of the Israel– Hamas war that began on October 7, 2023, and to explore its broader implications on regional and global geopolitics. The conflict marked a dramatic escalation in the longstanding Israeli–Palestinian struggle, with Hamas launching an unprecedented coordinated attack on Israel. This essay offers a comprehensive analysis, focusing on major conclusions drawn from the war’s consequences. These conclusions highlight the shifting military strategies of Hamas, Iran’s role as a key enabler of non-state actors in the region, and the regionalization of the conflict, with Hezbollah and other militias contributing to heightened instability. Additionally, the war exposed vulnerabilities in Israel’s security apparatus challenged global diplomacy, and intensified the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, while reshaping internal Palestinian political dynamics. The essay also examines the future of the conflict, which is deepened, entrenched positions and diminished prospects for peace. Finally, the essay seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the complexities driving the conflict and its broader implications for Middle Eastern geopolitics and global security.

Key words: Middle East, Security, War, Conflicts, Stability

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East is referred to as the cradle of civilization and is imbued with rich cultural, religious, and historical significance. However, it is equally characterized by enduring geopolitical conflicts that have shaped its contemporary landscape. Among these conflicts, the interplay between Iran, Israel, and the Palestinian territories stands out as particularly intricate and consequential. This triadic relationship has evolved through a complex web of historical grievances, ideological rivalries, and strategic interests, rendering the pursuit of peace and stability an ongoing challenge.

The historical roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict date back to the early 20th century, driven by competing nationalist movements. The emergence of Zionism, which sought to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine, collided with Arab nationalism, leading to tensions that escalated after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. This event marked a turning point, resulting in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and the solidification of a contentious narrative surrounding identity and territorial claims. Over the decades, subsequent wars, uprisings, and failed peace processes have further entrenched divisions, resulting in deep-seated animosities that persist to this day.

In this complex milieu, Iran has emerged as a critical actor, significantly influencing regional dynamics through its support for militant groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. The Islamic Republic of Iran, which views itself as a leader of the anti-Zionist movement represented by Israel, positions its support for Palestinian causes as part of a broader ideological struggle against Western imperialism and perceived Israeli aggression. Iran's nuclear ambitions and its pursuit of military capabilities add a layer of complexity, prompting regional and international actors to reconsider their strategic calculations in response to its actions.

Furthermore, non-state actors play a critical role in this geopolitical landscape. Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip, and Hezbollah, active in Lebanon, serve as instruments of Iranian influence and embody the aspirations of their respective populations for resistance and self-determination. Their actions and rhetoric reflect deeply held grievances against Israel and the broader implications of foreign intervention in their struggles, thereby complicating efforts toward a sustainable resolution. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, ignited by Hamas's surprise attack on October 7, 2023, has resulted in significant casualties and widespread destruction, intensifying regional tensions between state actors and non-state actors. The escalation after the Hamas attack marked a significant turning point. Hamas militants breached Israeli borders and killed numerous civilians, prompting a large-scale Israeli military response involving airstrikes, ground operations, and an attempt to dismantle Hamas's military infrastructure. Iran's support for Hamas is central to this dynamic, by supplying financial aid, weapons, and training, thereby enabling Hamas to maintain its operations and assert itself as a major regional player. Iran uses Hamas as a proxy to challenge Israeli power and U.S. influence without engaging directly in conflict. This has created a complex geopolitical landscape in which Hamas serves as a strategic tool for state actors, extending conflicts and destabilizing the regional order.

This paper examines the relationships and underlying factors that define the political and geopolitical dynamics between Iran, Israel, and the Palestinian territories. By examining historical narratives, ideological frameworks, and the influence of social identities, the analysis will employ a constructivist approach to understand how perceptions and identities shape the interactions among these key players. This paper adopts a constructivist framework to analyze how historical narratives, ideological constructions, and identity politics shape the regional order. It explores how the interplay of state and non-state actors, which are embedded in broader geopolitical shifts, affects prospects for peace and conflict resolution. Understanding these dynamics is essential to formulating strategies that address both material interests and deeply ingrained perceptions.

Historical Context of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Middle East is known for its persistent geopolitical turmoil. Due to its geopolitical position and oil production, the Middle East has always been a source of political instability that has crucial global implications (Fukutomi, 2024). At the heart of this instability lies a complex web of historical grievances, ideological rivalries, and strategic competition, particularly among Iran, Israel, and the Palestinian territories. These relationships are deeply influenced by colonial legacies, nationalist movements, and the enduring struggle over identity and sovereignty (Gause, 2017).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, rooted in competing nationalisms, has become emblematic of broader regional tensions. This historical rupture has sparked multiple

wars, two Intifadas, and repeated failed peace efforts, deepening hostility and mistrust (Mearsheimer, 2017). These events have fostered resentment and animosity, particularly from Iran, which views itself as a champion of the Palestinian cause. This ideological stance is reflected in Iran's support for Hamas and Hezbollah, which are committed to opposing Israeli statehood (Abrahamian, 2018). Their influence was profound and multifaceted, as these groups played major roles in shaping political, military, and social developments. They operated independently of state control, yet significantly influenced local and regional geopolitics (Berti, 2016; Gerges, 2015).

In Middle Eastern regional politics, the Israel-Palestine conflict has been a key factor in shaping political dynamics. The ideological rivalries between Iran, Israel, and Palestinian factions significantly hinder peace processes (Itzchakov, 2023). The historical narrative plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions and justifying actions, as Iranian leaders invoke the memory of historical injustices to galvanize domestic support and legitimize their stance against Israel. This historical framing perpetuates hostilities and fosters an environment conducive to conflict rather than cooperation (Ahram, 2024).

Iran has positioned itself as a central actor in the regional balance of power, using a combination of ideological influence and strategic proxy warfare. Through its support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Iran advances both its anti-Zionist ideology and its regional aspirations (Gause, 2017). While serving its interests, these non-state actors also embody local demands for resistance and self-determination, reflecting a convergence of state and grassroots grievances.

The conflict plays a central role in shaping Middle Eastern political dynamics. Iran's invocation of historical injustices against Palestinians serves to consolidate domestic legitimacy and mobilize transnational solidarity (Ahram, 2024). These narratives contribute to a sustained atmosphere of confrontation, complicating peace initiatives and reinforcing geopolitical rivalries (Itzchakov, 2023). Hezbollah and Hamas are crucial in shaping political alliances and regional power dynamics in the Middle East, as these non-state actors contribute to the formation of alternative axes of influence, rivaling state-centric geopolitical strategies.

The Gaza Strip has evolved into a focal point of regional tensions and global concern. Governed by Hamas since 2007, it remained under an Israeli-Egyptian blockade that severely restricts the movement of goods and people. By 2020, the United Nations declared Gaza "uninhabitable" due to deteriorating living conditions, exacerbated by continued conflict and resource deprivation. The war that started in 2023 underscores the regional and international implications of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

The Hamas-led attack, involving mass infiltration and violence against civilians and military targets, triggered a significant Israeli military response. This confrontation, while centered in Gaza and southern Israel, reverberated throughout the region and catalyzed diplomatic crises worldwide. El-Shewy et al. (2024) argue that Iran's support for Hamas through arms transfers, training, and financial backing is part of a deliberate effort to challenge Israeli dominance and U.S. influence in the region without direct engagement.

The international reaction to the Gaza war, particularly from the U.S. and European Union, highlighted deep divisions over the appropriate balance between national security and humanitarian protection. While many Western nations supported Israel's right to defend itself, international legal scholars and humanitarian organizations expressed concern over the proportionality of Israeli responses and the extensive civilian toll. Indyk and Ross (2021) argue that such escalations force global

powers to reassess their Middle East strategies, balancing long-standing alliances with emerging demands for accountability, human rights protection, and sustainable conflict resolution. These conflicts serve as both agents of local governance and proxies in broader geopolitical conflicts. Their autonomous nature, external backing, and entrenched ideological positions present significant barriers to traditional peacebuilding. As such, any comprehensive approach to conflict resolution and regional diplomacy must integrate strategies for engaging these actors alongside state entities. The involvement of local and global actors complicates traditional diplomacy and conflict resolution, necessitating new approaches that address both state and non-state influences.

The Middle East region plays a critical role in global affairs due to its geography and natural resources, holding some of the world's largest reserves of oil and gas, especially in countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and the UAE. The United States has traditionally been the dominant external power in the region by securing access to oil, combating terrorism, and supporting allies like Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE (Roberts, 2025). However, the persistent interplay between state interests, non-state proxies, and ideological confrontations renders the Israel-Iran conflict, and its manifestations through Hezbollah and Hamas, resilient to resolution. Any path toward de-escalation requires diplomatic engagement with Iran's nuclear program and a new approach to resolving the Palestinian issue and curbing the influence of proxy militias. Without addressing these root causes and strategic incentives, the region will remain mired in instability, with recurring cycles of violence and limited prospects for sustainable peace.

The Role of Non-State Actors and Proxy Warfare

Non-state actors (NSAs) in the Middle East significantly shape regional dynamics by acting as instruments of foreign policy, challenging state sovereignty, and perpetuating conflicts. They have become central to the Middle East's geopolitical landscape, serving as proxies for regional and global powers to exert influence without direct military engagement. These groups pursue the agendas of their state sponsors and maintain their political and ideological goals, further complicating diplomatic engagements.

Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza receive support from Iran, enabling Iran to pursue its strategic objectives while minimizing confrontation risks. This strategy allows for indirect power projection, cost-effectively extending influence across borders (Al-Khulaifi, 2025). These militant groups are central to the evolving power architecture of the Middle East. Their actions transcend national boundaries, influence inter-state alliances, and drive regional and international political agendas. Their dual identity allows them to navigate between political legitimacy and military resistance. Yet their presence also fractures internal governance - especially in the Palestinian territories - while provoking external military responses and obstructing diplomatic progress (Weissenburger, 2024).

The dynamic interplay between territorial disputes, ideological motivations, and external patronage by regional powers like Iran shapes the strategic behavior of non-state actors such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Their capacity to influence conflict trajectories and disrupt state-led diplomacy demonstrates the increasing importance of non-state actors in regional power politics. These groups reflect the fragmentation of traditional state authority and underscore the growing significance of asymmetric warfare in shaping the geopolitical order (Madani, 2024).

These proxy relationships have transformed local conflicts into arenas for broader geopolitical contests, prolonging hostilities and complicating resolution efforts. Global powers, including the United States, Russia, and China, also engage in proxy warfare to safeguard their interests (Calder, 2025). The utilization of non-state actors as proxies has become a defining feature of Middle Eastern conflicts, enabling states to project power indirectly while complicating efforts toward conflict resolution and challenging state sovereignty. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for formulating effective strategies that promote peace and stability in the region.

Iran's involvement gave it strategic depth and leverage over Israeli and Western interests while Saudi Arabia's support for various factions in Yemen reflects a broader contest with Iran for regional supremacy. These rivalries have transformed localized conflicts into arenas for broader geopolitical competition, entrenching violence and complicating resolution efforts. However, while proxy warfare enables indirect power projection, it also poses challenges to peacebuilding, state sovereignty, and diplomatic engagement. The Persian Gulf's security architecture finds itself in a period of transition with the increasing insecurity of Red Sea shipping due to Houthi attacks, backed by Iran (Kamrava, 2025).

The Israel–Iran rivalry, deeply embedded in ideological antagonism and strategic competition, has become a defining axis of instability in the Middle East. This protracted conflict transcends direct state confrontation, manifesting through proxy warfare, cyber operations, and sustained support for non-state actors. Iran's nuclear ambitions, coupled with its sponsorship of anti-Israel groups, have heightened Israeli security concerns and driven a doctrine of preemption and deterrence (Perletta, 2024). Iran leverages its alliances with Hezbollah and Hamas to project power and challenge Israel's regional dominance without engaging in direct warfare. The entrenchment of these dynamics illustrates the multifaceted nature of modern conflict, where cyber capabilities, asymmetric tactics, and ideological narratives play a critical role in conventional military strength. Territorial disputes, especially regarding Gaza and the broader Palestinian question, continue to provide fertile ground for conflict and resistance movements, as seen in the cyclical violence between Israel and Hamas. The ongoing failure to resolve these core issues has intensified radicalization and undermined prospects for peace. Although the 2020 Abraham Accords were viewed as a harbinger of a new regional order, the unprecedented attacks by Hamas on Israel on 7 October 2023, and Israel's counterattack, have upended that process (Jones, 2025).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has historically been a central pillar in the foreign policy narratives of the six Gulf monarchies - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Support for Palestine has served as a symbol of Arab solidarity, a tool for domestic legitimacy, and a strategic positioning within the regional and Islamic world order. However, Hamas's attack on Israel and Israel's ensuing military campaign in Gaza triggered a massive regional and global backlash. As explained by Szalai (2025), the Israeli-Palestinian issue, once the cornerstone of Gulf diplomacy, has become a flexible symbol, shaped by shifting geopolitical realities, national interests, and domestic legitimacy needs. The Abraham Accords revealed a willingness to de-prioritize Palestine for strategic gains, but the Gaza war reignited traditional commitments, at least rhetorically. The Gulf states navigate a complex balancing act between normalization with Israel, domestic and pan-Arab public opinion, and their roles in a volatile regional order.

The U.S. remains Israel's staunchest ally, offering full diplomatic and military support during the conflict. President Donald Trump's proposal that the U.S. should take over and own Gaza reflects an extreme policy shift. During a February 4, 2025,

press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, Trump called for a new approach to the region's future and hinted at a permanent U.S. presence or control in Gaza. Trump contradicted that by suggesting Palestinians would not return to Gaza, and would instead receive "much better housing" elsewhere - implying a permanent displacement, raising concerns about ethnic cleansing and violation of international law. Nevertheless, Trump's plan has sparked an international outcry, with concerns raised about destabilizing the region. As explained by Malik (2024), the Middle East instability could accelerate shifts toward a multipolar world, where nations look to Russia, China, or regional blocs as alternatives to Western influence.

External Powers and a Changing Global Order

The Hamas-led attack was marked by a coordinated offensive involving ground incursions, rocket salvos, and hostage-taking, and represented a dramatic escalation in the long-running conflict. Departing from its previous reliance on guerrilla tactics and intermittent rocket attacks, Hamas demonstrated an unprecedented level of operational coordination and strategic ambition. This shift marked Hamas's transition from a harassing force to a confrontation-capable actor with the potential to shape regional dynamics on a broader scale (Akbarzadeh and Naeni, 2025). While Iran did not directly orchestrate the attack, its role as a principal strategic enabler of Hamas was starkly underscored. Iran's provision of financial resources, military training, and technological support has allowed Hamas to sustain operations under siege conditions. This war reaffirmed the effectiveness of Iran's proxy warfare strategy in enabling non-state actors to challenge Israel's military superiority and in advancing its regional objectives. The Hamas assault exposed grave failures within Israel's intelligence and security apparatus. The death of 1,200 civilians and the kidnapping of 251 individuals not only triggered a multi-front war but also shook public confidence in the Israeli state's capacity to ensure security. Israel's long-standing deterrence doctrine suffered a critical blow, and its image of invulnerability was dismantled - necessitating a fundamental reassessment of national defense and intelligence strategies.

The strategic landscape is further shaped by the involvement of external powers. The United States has long been a dominant force, particularly through its unwavering support for Israel (Chaziza, 2024). The rivalry between Israel, a Western-aligned liberal democracy, and Iran, a revolutionary theocracy opposed to Western hegemony, is central to understanding the broader dynamics of Middle Eastern conflicts. This rivalry is shaped by competing ideological visions, geopolitical interests, and proxy engagements that have destabilized the region. Israel views Iran's nuclear ambitions as an existential threat, while Iran positions itself as a leader of the anti-Zionist axis, using opposition to Israel as a cornerstone of its regional strategy and a tool to rally support among both domestic audiences and Shia-aligned groups (Ahn, 2025).

The strategic interests of Iran, Israel, and the Palestinians are also reflected in their shifting alliances within the Middle East. Iran's support for anti-Israeli forces has led to the consolidation of various groups under its influence, creating a network of alliances that challenges Israel's regional standing. According to Kausch (2017), the proxy strategies employed by these states have contributed to prolonged instability in the region by intensifying conflicts and making them more resistant to resolution.

Israeli perceptions of Iranian expansionism and support for proxy groups create a security dilemma wherein Israel feels compelled to act preemptively against perceived threats, further complicating peace negotiations. This cycle of suspicion and

retaliation stifles dialogue and reduces trust among the involved parties (Kızılyurt, 2025). Israel has sought to counter Iranian influence by forging new alliances, particularly with Arab states that share concerns about Iran's ambitions. The normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab countries, as seen in the Abraham Accords, reflects a strategic realignment in the region motivated by shared interests in countering Iranian power (Madani, 2024).

A critical dimension of this rivalry is Iran's nuclear program. Israel has long maintained a policy of nuclear ambiguity while aggressively opposing the possibility of Iranian nuclear capability (Rodman, 2025). Serscikov (2025) explains that Iranian identity is influenced by politics, history, religion, and geography, giving rise to Iran's strategic culture. However, according to Cohen (2017), Israel's foremost national security concern is the prevention of a nuclear-armed Iran, as such an outcome would fundamentally alter the regional balance of power and diminish Israel's deterrent edge. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) signed in 2015 by the Obama Administration, aimed at limiting Iran's nuclear development in exchange for sanctions relief, was strongly opposed by Israel. Israeli leaders argued that the agreement lacked sufficient enforcement mechanisms and would ultimately enable Iran to resume its nuclear weapons program once restrictions expired. The agreement was later canceled by the United States in 2018, during the first Trump Administration. In the second administration, Trump insists on dismantling Iran's nuclear capabilities and aims to use military force if peace resolution remains undecided (Rynhold, 2024).

In addition to overt diplomatic and military posturing, Israel and Iran have waged a covert and cyber war which underscores the multifaceted nature of the conflict, extending beyond traditional battlefield engagements into the digital domain, further escalating regional insecurity (Mohammadpour, 2024). Iran has increasingly employed its drone technology in geopolitical conflicts beyond its borders and in April 2024 launched 300 drones and missiles at Israel, in an unprecedented attack (Ben-David et al., 2025).

Hamas, although a Sunni Islamist group, has also benefited from Iranian patronage, especially in terms of military and financial support. While relations between Hamas and Iran cooled following the Syrian Civil War, they have since been revitalized amid growing tensions with Israel. Iran has provided Hamas with training, funds, and weapons manufacturing expertise, particularly in the development of longer-range rockets used during the May 2021 and October 2023 escalations. This renewed alignment has bolstered Hamas's military capabilities and allowed it to maintain prolonged resistance against Israel despite facing significant technological and economic disadvantages.

At the heart of the Israel–Hamas conflict lies a deeply entrenched territorial dispute, particularly over the Gaza Strip. Since Hamas's takeover of Gaza in 2007, Israel and Egypt have imposed a land, sea, and air blockade, justified on security grounds to prevent the import of weapons. However, the blockade contributed to a humanitarian crisis and fostered widespread resentment among Palestinians (Zomlot, 2016). Hamas has leveraged this discontent to legitimize its rule and frame its armed struggle as a defense of Palestinian rights and national dignity. The war that erupted in 2023 proved that Islamists across the region are significant actors in the conflict and that the Arab Islamist field has been affected by the war (Gunning & Valbjørn, 2025).

The recurring cycles of violence are rooted in mutual distrust and incompatible objectives. Israel demands Hamas's disarmament and recognition of the Jewish state, while Hamas insists on the right of return for Palestinian refugees and an end to the occupation. These irreconcilable positions perpetuate a cycle of ceasefire

breakdowns, escalations, and humanitarian crises. Each conflict not only exacts a devastating toll on civilians but also reinforces hardline positions on both sides, making diplomatic resolutions increasingly elusive (Bloxham, 2025).

Analysis

Israel experienced a surprise and devastating attack by Hamas terrorists. This assault resulted in the deaths of 1200 civilians and the kidnapping of 251 individuals, leading to the eruption of a full-scale war between Israel and its neighbors. The failure of the government, the military, and the intelligence agencies to protect Israeli civilians and the subsequent multi-front conflict has profoundly shaken citizens' trust in the State, potentially affecting their national future outlook.

Upon news breaking of the 7 October 2023 atrocities committed by members of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, other groups, and elements of Gaza's civilian population, the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign (PSC) tweeted: "The offensive launched from Gaza today can only be understood in the context of Israel's ongoing, decades-long, military occupation and colonization of Palestinian land and imposition of a system of oppression that meets the legal definition of apartheid." (Palestine Solidarity Campaign, 2023).

The attack rapidly evolved into a regional conflict, with Hezbollah launching cross-border strikes from Lebanon, militias in Syria and Iraq targeting U.S. assets, and the Houthis in Yemen threatening maritime shipping. This regionalization of the Israel–Hamas war emphasized the interconnectedness of various state and non-state actors in the Middle East, all of whom are either directly or indirectly aligned with the broader Iranian-led axis of resistance. This network of actors poses a significant challenge to regional stability, as it ensures that the conflict between Israel and Hamas cannot be contained within Gaza's borders, but rather becomes a component of a larger, multifaceted geopolitical struggle.

The attack severely undermined Israel's deterrence doctrine, which has been a cornerstone of its security strategy for decades. The unprecedented scale and sophistication of the assault, coupled with its ability to penetrate Israel's defensive systems and intelligence operations, exposed significant vulnerabilities in the country's security apparatus. For Israel, the attack shattered its image of invulnerability and military superiority, signaling the need for a fundamental reassessment of its approach to regional security. The effectiveness of Israel's intelligence-gathering and military capabilities was called into question, forcing the country to confront new threats in a highly volatile environment.

The war quickly escalated into a global diplomatic crisis, with countries worldwide weighing in on the conflict's legitimacy and Israel's military actions. Western powers, particularly the U.S. and European Union, were forced to balance support for Israel's right to self-defense with mounting concerns over civilian casualties in Gaza. The humanitarian crisis and the high number of casualties generated intense international criticism, particularly from Arab and Muslim-majority nations. The war reignited global debates about the Palestinian cause, exacerbating diplomatic tensions between Israel's allies and adversaries. This growing polarization underscores how the Israeli–Palestinian conflict remains a central issue in global geopolitics, with far-reaching consequences for international relations.

The war generated a staggering number of civilian casualties and sparked a profound humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The widespread destruction of infrastructure, homes, and critical services has left Gaza's population in dire conditions. This reality

has reshaped the global narrative surrounding the conflict, with Israel's military actions facing increasing scrutiny. While Israel frames its operations as legitimate self-defense, international human rights organizations have raised concerns about the disproportionate use of force and violations of international law. The scale of the humanitarian crisis has led to a significant shift in public opinion, particularly in the West, where protests against Israeli military actions have escalated (Rudolf, 2024).

The war presented a significant stress test for the Abraham Accords, the normalization agreements between Israel and several Arab states, including the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco. While these states did not sever ties with Israel, they expressed increasing frustration with the ongoing violence and Israel's military operations in Gaza (Schultz, 2024). The war further demonstrated that while economic and diplomatic ties may have been forged through the Accords, they remain vulnerable to the instability of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Saudi Arabia's delicate balancing act, as it moved toward potential normalization with Israel, also faced significant setbacks, illustrating the fragility of peace agreements in the face of persistent conflict (Bhattarai and Yousef, 2025). Additionally, the U.S. has utilized its hegemonic position in the international system to debilitate Iran's oil industry by imposing an unprecedented and comprehensive range of sanctions and creating alternatives to Iranian oil in the global market, leading Iran's closest consumers to use alternative suppliers (Cildir, 2025).

Strategic and Geopolitical Implications

The war that began on October 7, 2023, represents a turning point in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and underscores the complex dynamics of Middle Eastern geopolitics. The Hamas-led attack on Israel, involving unprecedented levels of coordination and lethality, transformed the military and political landscape and illuminated broader trends, such as the regionalization of conflict, the instrumental role of non-state actors, and the implications of international multipolarity.

The war reinforced how localized escalations can reverberate across the region. It intensified tensions between Israel and Iran, whose support for Hamas and Hezbollah continues to represent a major axis of confrontation in the Middle East (Akbarzadeh & Naeni, 2025). Gulf powers, particularly Saudi Arabia and Iran, have long utilized proxies to project power, creating a fractured regional order in which state authority is undermined and peacebuilding initiatives are repeatedly derailed. Iran's proxy strategy is rooted in its goal of asymmetric power projection. Through groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, Iran maintains strategic leverage across the Levant and the Palestinian Territories without direct military confrontation. This reflects a deliberate strategy of proxy warfare - a way to challenge Israeli and Western-aligned states while minimizing direct repercussions (Eisenstadt et al, 2020).

Iran's support for Hamas is multifaceted - providing financial assistance, weapons, and training. The support allows Hamas to maintain a sustained campaign against Israel despite the Israeli blockade and repeated military incursions. Israel, in turn, perceives Iran's nuclear ambitions and entrenchment in neighboring countries as existential threats, justifying its increasingly assertive regional posture (Albalawi, 2024). Perletta (2023) explains that Iran's approach is less about abandoning non-alignment and more about redefining it in light of new geopolitical realities. It reflects a flexible strategy where the Islamic Republic still rejects dependency on Western powers, but no longer treats alignment with Eastern powers as incompatible with its founding principles.

Hamas and Hezbollah are not merely militant organizations; they are also political entities that influence domestic governance and transnational alignments. Their rise has complicated the already fragmented Palestinian political landscape. Hamas's refusal to accept Israel's legitimacy, its rejection of the Oslo Accords, and its continued commitment to armed struggle have undermined the Palestinian Authority and weakened unified Palestinian diplomacy. This reaffirms Iran's approach of using ideologically aligned but politically autonomous allies to pursue strategic regional interests.

The October 7 attacks marked a significant escalation in Hamas's military strategy. Departing from prior tactics centered on sporadic rocket fire and guerrilla warfare, Hamas executed a coordinated assault involving ground incursions, hostage-taking, and mass rocket barrages (Bloxham, 2025). This shift highlighted Hamas's enhanced military capacity and tactical sophistication, likely enabled by years of external support and localized training (International Crisis Group, 2023).

This redefinition of Hamas's military role has regional implications, positioning the group as a local resistance movement and a regional actor capable of shaping geopolitical outcomes (Alderdice, 2025). Although no direct evidence links Iran to planning the October 7 attack, its strategic enabler role is undeniable. Iran's support infrastructure for Hamas has allowed the group to sustain its operations under siege, enabling it to project force at a level not previously seen. The war revealed how Iran's long-term investment in proxy warfare continues to bear strategic dividends by allowing Tehran to influence regional conflict without direct engagement (Walt, 2023).

This dynamic has reignited the debate between armed resistance and political negotiation, further deepening the chasm between Hamas in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. The war forced a recalibration of diplomatic relations across the region. It stalled normalization talks between Saudi Arabia and Israel and reignited Arab League solidarity with Palestine, albeit largely symbolic. The Gulf states, especially Qatar and Saudi Arabia, assumed roles as mediators and humanitarian coordinators, balancing public support for Palestine with international diplomatic constraints (El-Shewy et al., 2024).

The current global order, characterized by increasing multipolarity, complicates alliance formation and intervention. As power becomes diffused between the United States, China, Russia, and emerging regional actors, responses to Middle East crises become more fragmented and less predictable. This has made it more difficult to coordinate effective diplomatic or peacekeeping initiatives (Aghlani, 2024).

The Hamas attacks sparked a severe Israeli military response in Gaza. Rather than seeking stability, Israel adopted an increasingly aggressive attempt to restructure Gaza's political reality through intense military operations. As a result, Iran has taken on a more cautious, status quo-oriented role, because it wants to avoid direct war with the U.S. or Israel and prefers to preserve influence through proxies like Hezbollah and the Houthis without large-scale escalation (Pinfold, 2025). Further, the Trump administration's support of Israel as a regional counterweight to Iran could lead to more drastic geopolitical changes in the region, with higher risks of escalation, weakened prospects for Palestinian sovereignty, and increased polarization among regional powers.

The long-term implications of the October 7 war are still unfolding. However, the war represents a strategic watershed in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and a broader manifestation of Middle Eastern geopolitical instability. It illustrates how non-state actors, regional rivalries, and global power shifts intertwine to perpetuate and intensify localized violence. Understanding this conflict requires acknowledging its

multilayered complexity, where ideology, power, identity, and geopolitics intersect. Further research is critical in tracking, interpreting, and responding to the complex, evolving dynamics of this war and the broader Middle East. It ensures that analysis stays grounded in facts rather than speculation and helps shape informed global and regional responses.

Conclusion

The war that began on October 7, 2023, marks a pivotal turning point in the protracted Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the broader Middle Eastern geopolitical order. More than just a military confrontation between Israel and Hamas, the conflict revealed the deep entrenchment of non-state actors in regional power struggles and underscored the evolving character of modern warfare, where proxy networks, asymmetric tactics, and digital influence play a central role. The attack by Hamas and Israel’s massive military response triggered a regional cascade involving Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria, and the Houthis in Yemen, transforming a localized conflict into a multi-front confrontation within the broader Iran–Israel rivalry.

This war has reshaped military doctrines and exposed critical vulnerabilities. For Israel, the breach of its border and the unprecedented number of civilian casualties shattered a sense of security and prompted a fundamental reassessment of its intelligence and defense apparatus. For Hamas, while the attack showcased new levels of coordination and operational boldness, it came at the cost of massive civilian suffering in Gaza, further isolating it diplomatically and intensifying internal Palestinian divisions. The war has simultaneously strengthened Hamas’s grip on Gaza while exposing its limits as a viable representative of Palestinian national aspirations.

Regionally, the war has exacerbated fragmentation. Gulf powers - especially Saudi Arabia and Iran - continue to project influence through proxies, fueling instability and undermining state sovereignty across Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq. Iran’s support for groups like Hamas and Hezbollah exemplifies its long-term strategy of asymmetric power projection aimed at challenging Israeli and American influence without engaging in direct warfare. These proxy dynamics perpetuate cycles of violence and make durable peace increasingly elusive.

Diplomatically, the conflict strained the Abraham Accords and tested the resolve of Arab states that had normalized ties with Israel. While most did not sever formal relations, the widespread public backlash in the Arab world revealed the fragile foundations of those agreements in the absence of a resolution to the Palestinian issue. The United States, while reaffirming its support for Israel, faced mounting pressure to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and recalibrate its approach toward regional diplomacy. At the same time, a more multipolar global order has complicated traditional alliance structures and diluted the West’s ability to shape outcomes unilaterally.

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