

PROXY DYNAMICS:

Analyzing Iran's Role in the Israel-Hamas Conflict and Impact on Indo Pacific

*Ifrah**

Abstract

Israel has been engaging in collaborative summits with other island nations in the Pacific region, including the Pacific Islands Forum. The most recent summit focused on combating climate change and discussed the potential establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and countries like Fiji, Nauru, and Niue. The strikes by Hamas and Israel's response threaten the reconciliation process and diplomatic alliances in the Indo-Pacific region. Around 500 individuals from various backgrounds are currently stranded between Gaza and Israel, exposing them to danger. The Israel-Hamas conflict could impact the diplomatic alliances of other nations in the Indo-Pacific region. Iran's backing of Hamas may influence the diplomatic response of governments in the Indo-Pacific, potentially leading to changes in alliances or foreign policy stances. Continuing conflicts rooted in religious or ideological differences can fuel radicalization and potentially affect regional security and stability in the Indo-Pacific. The Middle East's escalations and instability, including Iran's engagement in the Israel-Hamas war, could lead to population displacements and migration, indirectly impacting worldwide migratory patterns, including moves towards the Indo-Pacific.

Keywords- Iran, Israel, Hamas, Indo-Pacific

Introduction

Conflict in the Gaza Strip: A Brief Overview

The conflict in the Gaza Strip originated in 19th and early 20th centuries, as Jewish and Arab national movements gained strength in the region.

**-Ph.D. Scholar, Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution
Jamia Millia Islamia*

The divergent aspirations of these movements resulted in profound discord. The United Nations' partition plan in 1947 sought to create separate Jewish and Arab states. However, the Arab nations rejected this proposal, resulting in subsequent conflicts and a series of wars. The 1967 Six-Day War was a significant shift, leading to Israel's acquisition of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, that continue to be vital to the current conflict.

Attempts to achieve a peaceful conclusion have faced several obstacles over the course of time. The negotiation process has been marked by contentious discussions on borders, refugees, and the position of Jerusalem. Moreover, the development and growth of Israeli settlements in the West Bank have intensified tensions, hence fueling a repetitive pattern of violence. Hamas, an Islamist political and militant organisation, arose in the late 1980s as a component of the Palestinian resistance movement opposing Israeli occupation. Its social services and the actions of its armed faction contributed to its rise in popularity. Nevertheless, various countries and entities, like the United States, European Union, and Israel, have designated it as a terrorist organisation.

After winning the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, Hamas faced a complicated political scenario where the internationally recognised Palestinian Authority governed the West Bank while Hamas governed the Gaza Strip. The conflict has witnessed intermittent escalations characterised by military confrontations and recurring episodes of violence, wherein rockets have been launched from Gaza into Israeli territory, prompting Israeli military interventions in retaliation, resulting in civilian losses on both sides. Diverse global initiatives, led by the UN, the US, the EU, and regional stakeholders, have sought to negotiate ceasefires and facilitate peace negotiations. Nevertheless, finding enduring solutions has proven to be challenging despite these efforts.

Iran's Support for Hamas: Impact on Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The relationship between Iran and Hamas, both representing the Muslim world, has been established based on their mutual anti-Israel attitude and resistance against perceived Western dominance in the region. Iran offers financial, military, and political assistance to Hamas, viewing the group as a vital participant in opposing Israeli occupation. Iran has supplied Hamas with rockets and other weapons, which have been added to the group's arsenal and deployed in confrontations against Israel. This assistance not only benefits Hamas's immediate objectives but also enables Iran to wield authority and sway in a region where it seeks to confront its adversaries, mainly Israel and Saudi Arabia.

In addition to providing military aid, Iran influences the portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through its state-controlled media and public declarations. It frequently criticises Israeli acts and presents itself as a backer of the Palestinian cause. Although this depiction assists Iran in upholding its reputation as a protector of the marginalised, it has faced censure for leveraging the Palestinian issue to serve its geopolitical objectives and employing proxy organisations such as Hamas to promote its regional ambitions. Furthermore, Iran's endorsement of extremist organisations has escalated tensions in the area and caused apprehension among nations that are against its sway.

The Israeli government views Iran's engagement as a direct menace to its security, primarily because of the potential for Iran to equip and endorse factions committed to the annihilation of Israel. Consequently, Israel has implemented diplomatic and military strategies to offset the impact of Iran in the region.

Iran's Opposition to Israel: A Historical Perspective

The relationship between Iran and Israel has been intricate and fraught with conflict.

Before the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Iran, a largely Shia Muslim nation, received disapproval from the wider Arab world due to its associations with Israel. Nevertheless, the revolution, spearheaded by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, signified a pivotal moment. The outcome led to the formation of an Islamic Republic and change in Iran's position against Israel.

The new Iranian leadership, motivated by ideological, religious, and anti-Zionist beliefs, has taken a position against Israel. The change in ideology, together with Iran's backing of militant organisations that are against Israel, put a strain on the relationship between the two countries. Iran's backing of Palestinian factions, notably Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, has become a crucial component of its hostility against

Israel. Iran offers financial, military, and political assistance to these groups, viewing them as crucial elements of the larger "Axis of Resistance" against Israeli and Western impact in the region.

The nuclear issue intensified the already heightened relations between Iran and Israel. Israel has openly expressed its opposition to Iran's nuclear programme, citing worries regarding the potential weaponization of Iran's nuclear capabilities. Israel, together with the international community, has advocated for diplomatic initiatives and sanctions to restrain Iran's nuclear aspirations. Conversely, Iran asserts that its nuclear endeavours are nonviolent. The historical relations between Iran and Israel have undergone oscillations, evolving from initial collaboration to a tense and combative state. These developments have been primarily impacted by geopolitical movements, ideological changes, and regional dynamics.

Diplomatic relations between Iran and Israel were established in 1950 under the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi.

Due to their location in mostly Arab nations, both governments had concerns regarding Arab nationalism and the influence of the Soviet Union. As a result, they formed a common understanding. This facilitated military, commercial, and intelligence cooperation, ultimately strengthening their bilateral relations. Iran, being a Muslim nation that is not Arab, sought to establish a strategic alliance with Israel in order to counterbalance Arab powers in the region. The Iranian Revolution of 1979, led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, was a momentous milestone. The establishment of the Islamic Republic resulted in a significant change in Iran's foreign policy, characterised by a strong stance against Israel that became a core principle of the new government's ideology. The revolution finally led to the severance of diplomatic ties between Iran and Israel. The rhetoric emanating from Tehran shifted towards supporting the Palestinian cause and condemning what it viewed as Israeli oppression.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the animosity between Iran and Israel grew more intense. Iran openly backed militant groups that opposed Israel, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon. The Iran-Iraq War further strained relations. While Israel covertly supported Iran against Saddam Hussein's Iraq during certain periods, the conflict solidified Iran's anti-Israel stance as the rhetoric from Tehran intensified. Amid the Iran-Iraq War, the US involvement in the Iran-Contra Affair included the covert sale of arms to Iran. Israel played a role in facilitating these arms transfers, leading to a temporary alignment of interests between Israel and Iran during this period.

The Iranian government's anti-Israel language and its calls for the state's destruction became increasingly prominent. In response, Israel regarded Iran as a significant regional menace and actively resisted its nuclear program, viewing it as a potential security threat. In the 21st century, they witnessed heightened tensions, particularly regarding Iran's nuclear program.

Israel, along with the international community, expressed apprehensions about the potential militarization of Iran's nuclear capabilities. The Iranian government sustained that its nuclear pursuits were peaceful, but the issue remained a source of contention. Additionally, Iran continued to support proxy groups, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which were involved in conflicts with Israel. In recent years, geopolitical shifts and changing alliances in the Middle East have further complicated Iran-Israel relations.

The support provided by Iran to Hezbollah in Lebanon has been a major source of strife. With the backing of Iran, Hezbollah has actively participated in confrontations against Israel, most notably during the 2006 Lebanon War. The group's continuous presence and influence in the area create conflict. The 2000s saw a heightened level of concern surrounding Iran's nuclear programme, with Israel expressing strong concerns about the potential threat. Israel, along with the international community, expressed concerns that Iran's nuclear activities were not solely peaceful. This subject emerged as a crucial concern on both a regional and global scale. During the Syrian Civil War, Iran and Israel became involved by offering assistance to conflicting sides. Israel expressed concerns on Iran's military engagement in Syria, viewing it as a threat to its security. This escalation intensified tensions and resulted in occasional military clashes. The Abraham Accords, negotiated by the United States, permitted the normalisation of relations between Israel and other Arab states, such as the UAE and Bahrain. While the incident did not have a direct effect on Iran-Israel ties, it reflected a changing regional environment that might potentially change the dynamics between the two countries.

Ideological and Strategic Dimensions: Iran's Support for the Palestinian Cause

The Palestinian cause is deeply founded in ideology, primarily because to the religious significance that Jerusalem carries for Muslims. The Iranian constitution, ratified in 1979, incorporated the country's dedication to disseminate its revolutionary principles worldwide in order to support marginalised populations. Over the years, strategic realpolitik considerations have increasingly taken precedence, particularly since the late 1980s. Iran altered its approach to strengthen Palestinian terrorist organisations as a crucial component of its regional security strategy. The objective of this approach was to divert attention and limit the actions of Israel, which Iran, in conjunction with the United States, perceives as its main sources of danger to both national security and internal stability.

Iran prioritises a group's willingness to combat Israel over its Islamic orientation. As a result, Iran, which declares itself as an Islamic Shia republic, has supported a wide range of parties, including secular, communist, and Sunni Islamist elements. Iran initially became involved in Palestinian issues by providing support to the secular Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) under Yasser Arafat. Prior to the 1979 ousting of the Shah, the PLO had extended its support to the Iranian revolutionaries, including offering security for Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini during his time of exile in Paris. Notable individuals during the early development of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps also underwent training at PLO facilities located in Lebanon. Notably, Arafat was the initial global leader to travel to Iran after the Islamic revolution.

However, the PLO's gradual shift in the 1980s towards more moderate stances—including secret negotiations with Israel, acceptance of a territorial division of historical Palestine, and a move away from armed conflict—led to strained relations with Iran. While Iran has persisted in offering support to some PLO factions, such as the Marxist-Leninist PFLP, it has primarily reallocated its support to Palestinian Islamist organizations, reflecting the diminished political and military significance of smaller Marxist-Leninist groups in the occupied territories.

Alliance between Sunni Hamas and PIJ and Shia Iran has consistently been a pragmatic one driven by mutual interests on the field, then a common ideological alignment with Tehran's political interpretation of Islam. Consequently, the groupings are continuously adapting their external relationships based on their strategic assessments. This was particularly apparent following the Arab upheavals.

The Syrian rebellion exemplifies the strategic manoeuvring between Iran and Hamas. The leaders of Hamas, who are located in Damascus, attempted to facilitate negotiations between the Syrian government and Sunni rebels. However, the political leadership of the group refused to comply with Iranian requests for an absolute backing for Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, resulting in a breakdown in relations. Iran responded by reducing its financial assistance to Hamas by 50%, from \$150 million to less than \$75 million. However, Tehran continued to uphold robust connections with uncompromising leaders of Hamas, situated in Gaza. Marwan Issa, the deputy leader of Hamas's military faction, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, made frequent trips to Tehran starting in 2012.

Iran then shifted a portion of its financial support to PIJ, an organisation that had previously remained impartial and refrained from openly criticising the Syrian government. However, a few of years later, PIJ's alliance with Iran also encountered challenges due to the Yemeni civil war in 2014. Like Hamas in the past, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's decision not to support the Iranian-backed Houthis or condemn Saudi Arabia's military action led to a reduction in Iranian financial support. On this occasion, the funds were diverted to the al-Sabireen movement in Gaza, which Iran supported in an effort to replace Hamas and PIJ with a more compliant substitute.

During this phase, both Hamas and PIJ endeavoured to shift their focus towards alternative sources of support. Hamas, having officially ended its ties with the government in Syria, aimed to position itself with the Sunni axis, which includes countries like Egypt and Gulf monarchies such as Qatar. As part of this realignment, prominent Hamas figures, like its former head Khaled Mashal, moved to Doha. In 2017, a more adaptable policy platform was introduced with the aim of enhancing the group's reputation in both the Arab world and the West.

PIJ endeavoured to execute its own strategic shift. Muhammad al-Hindi, a high-ranking member of the organisation, embarked on trips to Algeria and Turkey to secure financial assistance, achieving some degree of success. In 2015, the Algerian authorities initiated the funding of "humanitarian projects" associated with the group. Nevertheless, this did not align with PIJ's earlier alliance with Iran and was instead restricted to occasional financial transactions. The group additionally created direct contact channels with Saudi Arabia and forged stronger ties with Egypt and Jordan in order to mitigate its financial challenges.

In a very unforeseen turn of events, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps made a commitment in May 2016 to transfer a sum of \$70 million to PIJ. It seems that this change in the group's stance on Yemen was influenced by external factors. A month later, a delegation from PIJ visited the Yemeni embassy (Damascus) and declared their support for the Yemeni people in their fight against foreign aggression. They also stated that attacking Yemen is equivalent to attacking the Palestinian cause.

The bond between PIJ and Iran may have been strengthened by personal ideological ideas. Ziyad al-Nakhala, who has been leading the group since 2018, seems to have a stronger affiliation with Iran compared to his predecessor, Ramadan Shallah.

The reestablishment of relations may also have indicated the movement's realisation that there were no other viable sources of money accessible to it. Subsequently, PIJ and Iran seem to have formed a stronger alliance.

Hamas has also endeavoured to improve its relations with Iran in the past year. The initial indication of this was conveyed through the arrival of Khalil al-Hayya, a prominent Hamas representative, in Damascus in October 2022. This marked the conclusion of over ten years of animosity between Hamas and the Syrian government, indicating its renewed alliance with Iran and the lack of success in its prior reorientation.

Amidst widespread conjecture regarding Iran's prior knowledge of the Hamas-led assaults on Israeli communities on 7 October, Tehran promptly evaded any direct accountability and notified Hamas's leader, Ismail Haniyeh, of its intention to offer solely political, rather than military, assistance in the conflict. This partially indicates Iran's intention to prevent a large-scale regional conflict that could jeopardise its strategic objectives. Hamas has been upset by Iran's repeated unwillingness to help during conflicts on previous occasions. Their partnership saw a temporary deterioration following Operation Cast Lead in 2008-2009, which was perceived as very detrimental to Iranian interests. Iran's choice to dissociate itself from the attacks on 7 October is consistent with its enduring strategy of backing Palestinian factions to enhance its own security.

The Iran-Hamas relationship has played a critical role in the intricate geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East, specifically within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Iran's support for Hamas extends beyond ideological affinity, encompassing financial sponsorship, military aid, and training. This diverse and complex support has not only impacted the dynamics of the conflict but has also sparked worries on the global scene.

Iran has been instrumental in providing enormous financial support to Hamas, serving as a major source of funding to finance its activities in the Gaza Strip. The primary objectives of this financial assistance are to facilitate the provision of social services, fund infrastructure development initiatives, and sustain the group's military capabilities. Iran's financial assistance has played a crucial role in boosting Hamas' status as a significant political and military power in the Palestinian territories. Hamas has heavily depended on Iran's financial assistance to handle the economic issues resulting from its isolation and confrontations with Israel, in order to meet the demands of the Palestinian populace. This assistance allows Hamas to strengthen its control and sustain public backing by mitigating the economic challenges experienced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Moreover, Iran's military assistance to Hamas includes the supply of weapons such as rockets and other munitions, bolstering Hamas's capabilities to confront Israel and resist perceived occupation. The provision of advanced weaponry empowers Hamas to pose a credible threat to Israel, significantly impacting the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Iran's military aid has been a key factor in enabling Hamas to engage in armed conflicts with Israel, including periodic exchanges of rocket fire and military operations. The weapons provided by Iran enhance Hamas's capacity to carry out attacks and defend itself against Israeli incursions, thus shaping the nature of the ongoing conflict.

Iran has not only offered financial and military assistance, but has also imparted training and expertise to Hamas operatives. Iranian military advisors and trainers have allegedly bolstered the proficiencies of Hamas combatants, specifically in guerilla warfare and the use of sophisticated armaments. The training provided by Iran enhances Hamas's operational efficacy, allowing the group to engage in asymmetric warfare against a technologically advanced opponent.

This aid enhances Hamas's strategic and tactical capacities, enabling them to adjust to changing military obstacles and sustain a robust presence in the battle.

The substantial backing that Iran provides to Hamas has generated global apprehension and exacerbated tensions in the area. Detractors contend that Iran's support for Hamas hampers endeavours towards a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The participation of external entities, notably Iran, in providing assistance to militant factions introduces intricacy to the already delicate geopolitical landscape in the Middle East.

Israel saw Iran's backing of Hamas as a direct peril to its security. Iran furnishes Hamas with financial help, military support, and training, so facilitating the group's ability to maintain its battle against Israel. As a result, there are occasional increases in violence in the region.

Motivations for Iran's Involvement - Regional influence and power dynamics, Ideological and religious motivations

Regional influence and power dynamics

Iran's support for Hamas is deeply rooted in its desire to expand its influence in the region. By aligning itself with groups that oppose Israeli interests, Iran aims to establish itself as a major player in the Middle East. Supporting Hamas allows Iran to project its power beyond its borders, challenging the influence of its regional rivals and positioning itself as a key player in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hamas, strategically located in the Palestinian territories, serves as a proxy through which Iran can exert its influence and shape events in the region. This support enables Iran to maintain a firm foothold in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, positioning itself as a defender of Palestinian rights. By doing so, Iran not only gains support and solidarity from like-minded entities in the region who share opposition to Israeli policies but also strengthens its position as a regional power.

Furthermore, Iran's backing of Hamas aligns with its broader strategy of fostering alliances with anti-Israel forces. This approach helps Iran counter the influence of Western powers in the Middle East and contributes to its efforts to reshape regional power dynamics. By supporting Hamas, Iran not only demonstrates its commitment to the Palestinian cause but also solidifies its position as a force to be reckoned with in the region. Iran's support for Hamas is intricately tied to its pursuit of regional influence. Through its alliance with Hamas, Iran seeks to establish itself as a significant player in the Middle East, challenge its regional rivals, and shape the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to its advantage. This support not only allows Iran to project power beyond its borders but also strengthens its position as a defender of Palestinian rights and a key player in the region's power dynamics.

Ideological and Religious Motivations:

Ideologically, Iran and Hamas share common ground in their opposition to Israel and their commitment to the Palestinian cause. Despite the religious differences between Iran's Shia Islamic republic and Hamas's Sunni Islamist orientation, their common anti-Israel stance forms a basis for collaboration. Both entities view the struggle against Israeli occupation as a central aspect of their ideologies. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, consistently expressed anti-Israel sentiments, framing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a struggle between oppressors and the oppressed. This narrative aligns with Hamas's rhetoric, fostering a shared perspective on the nature of the conflict.

Religious motivations also contribute to Iran's support for Hamas. The leadership in Tehran sees backing Palestinian resistance groups as a sacred duty rooted in the principles of the Islamic Revolution. This religious perspective underscores the significance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within the context of injustices and oppression.

Iran's involvement in supporting Hamas is driven by a combination of strategic regional considerations, a quest for influence, and deeply rooted ideological and religious motivations. The strategic regional concerns stem from Iran's desire to expand its influence in the Middle East and counterbalance Israel's power in the region. By supporting Hamas, Iran can project its influence and challenge Israel's dominance.

Furthermore, Iran's collaboration with Hamas has far-reaching implications beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It shapes the broader geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. Iran's support for Hamas not only bolsters the group's capabilities but also strengthens Iran's position as a regional power player. This collaboration allows Iran to exert influence and gain leverage in the region, potentially challenging the interests of other regional actors, such as Saudi Arabia and the US.

Understanding the nuanced interplay of regional influence, power dynamics, and ideological motivations is essential for comprehending the complexities of Iran's involvement with Hamas. It is a multifaceted relationship that intertwines religious, ideological, and strategic considerations. By recognizing the shared anti-Israel stance, religious duty, and strategic calculations, one can grasp the intricate dynamics at play. This understanding is crucial for policymakers and analysts seeking to navigate the complex landscape of the Middle East and address the challenges posed by Iran's collaboration with Hamas. Iran and Hamas find common ground in their opposition to Israel and their commitment to the Palestinian cause. Shared anti-Israel sentiments, religious motivations, and strategic considerations drive their collaboration. This collaboration impacts the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and shapes the broader geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. Recognizing the interplay of regional influence, power dynamics, and ideological motivations is crucial for comprehending the complexities of Iran's involvement with Hamas.

By understanding these factors, policymakers and analysts can better navigate the complex landscape of the Middle East and address the challenges posed by this collaboration.

Indo-Pacific Implications

Following the 7 October attacks, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi promptly voiced his endorsement of Israel and denounced Hamas on X. In the past, India strongly supported the Palestinian cause, while also maintaining diplomatic relations with Israel as part of its nonalignment policy. In 1992, India established its embassy in Tel Aviv, marking the initiation of bilateral trade and partnership across all industries between the two nations. As an illustration, Haifa has two ports, one of which is owned by the Adani group. Israeli investment in India's defence sector exceeded \$270 billion between 2000 and 2022, establishing Israel as a significant trading partner for India. The Modi government places great significance on maintaining strong diplomatic ties with Middle Eastern countries due to their economic significance and the substantial presence of the Indian diaspora in the region. From Pakistan, India's longstanding adversary, tensions along the border in Jammu and Kashmir are resurfacing. At position 12, the stance on Palestine remains to denounce Israeli assaults and urge the global community to achieve an absolute cessation of hostilities, while widespread protests are occurring in several locations, with demonstrators screaming slogans against the United States and Israel. Other nations in the vicinity, such as Nepal, responded in a comparable manner to India and demonstrated their support for Israel, given that ten Nepalese students were also casualties of Hamas assaults. Sri Lanka's stance is rather balanced due to its intricate domestic circumstances, denouncing the fatalities inflicted by both Hamas and Israel in Gaza. Bhutan, another stakeholder in the region, maintains formal connections with Israel but has shown limited enthusiasm towards the ongoing conflict.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has displayed remarkable caution in its response to the eruption of unrest in the Middle East, particularly in Southeast Asia. ASEAN is the primary supranational organisation in the sub-region and comprises Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Singapore, and Myanmar. During the unfolding events, a summit was being held with the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (CCG). This summit, along with their customary neutrality in open conflicts, prompted their reaction of jointly calling for an immediate ceasefire, the release of hostages, and the urgent provision of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. ASEAN itself exhibits evidence of disunity in its response to the crisis, with the Philippines firmly supporting Israel and Indonesia adopting a more aggressive stance towards Israel's reaction. Furthermore, Indonesia has been actively involved in the development of infrastructure in the Gaza Strip for several years. Indonesia, the nation boasting the highest number of Muslims globally, does not acknowledge Israel as a sovereign state. In March of last year, the country lost the opportunity to host the U20 World Cup due to widespread anti-Semitic protests, particularly in Jakarta, as Israel was scheduled to participate in the tournament. Malaysia is another state that does not acknowledge the existence of Israel. However, certain ASEAN nations, like the Philippines and Singapore, have established strong ties with Israel. In 2020, Singapore even inaugurated an Israeli embassy and initiated previously non-existent trade relations. It is worth noting that due to social polarisation, public demonstrations in support of either Israel or the Palestinians have been prohibited. Israel has a dynamic trading relationship with Vietnam, a country that is highly sensitive, particularly in relation to the defence sector, where Israel plays a significant role as a key supplier. The Vietnamese government urged for composure and self-control about the situation in the Middle East, advocating for diplomatic discussions between the involved parties.

The primary Indo-Pacific region, encompassing China, Japan, and South Korea, has been distinguished by prudence and official declarations advocating for reconciliation. Chinese diplomacy played a significant role in facilitating the reestablishment of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran in May of last year. China positioned itself as a mediator and advocate for dialogue in the Middle East, even in respect to Israel. This is because China is neither a strategic rival nor a source of threat. Since 7 October, there have been reports of Chinese vessels in the seas near the conflict zone. However, these vessels were actually there for pre-scheduled naval training with Oman. China has positioned itself as an intermediary in the potential reduction of Israeli-Palestinian hostilities, expressing disapproval of the Israeli government's reaction to Hamas assaults and the US stance of blocking a UN Security Council resolution that advocated for a temporary cessation of hostilities. China has recently declared its provision of humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip. Japan denounced Hamas for their assaults and additionally committed \$10 million in humanitarian assistance for the Gaza Strip. Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa held a meeting with Mahmoud Abbas on 14 October during her participation in an international conference in Egypt, with the aim of discussing resolutions to the conflict. Nevertheless, due to global geopolitics and the dynamic relationships between nations in the Indo-Pacific region, Japan is strongly connected with the United States and its allies, including Israel, with whom it has certain mutual interests. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida criticised the Hamas attack but avoided labelling it as 'terrorism' and is advocating for Japan to develop an independent Middle East strategy rather than relying solely on the US. Japan's economy relies heavily on the Middle East oil market, as around 80% of the crude oil required for its survival is sourced from that region. Hence, the response of countries like Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates must be adjusted accordingly to the current issue.

Following the 7 October attacks, the Australian government is oscillating between supporting Israel's justified right to protect itself against Hamas attacks and urging the Netanyahu government to adhere to international law and the principles of warfare by minimising civilian casualties. Israel has actively engaged in several collaborative summits with other island nations in the region, including the Pacific Islands Forum. The most recent summit took place in September 2023, with a primary focus on combating climate change. Additionally, discussions were held regarding the potential establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and countries like Fiji, Nauru, and Niue³³, including the possibility of opening embassies. However, similar to other situations in the Indo-Pacific region, the strikes by Hamas and the subsequent response from Israel appear to threaten this process of reconciliation. Furthermore, the situation is exacerbated by the fact that around five hundred individuals from various backgrounds, including Australia, Samoa, Vanuatu, Cook Islands, Tonga, Fiji, and Solomon Islands, are currently stranded between Gaza and Israel. This predicament exposes them to significant danger and jeopardises their lives.

The Israel-Hamas conflict has the potential to impact the diplomatic alliances of other nations. The diplomatic response of governments in the Indo-Pacific may be influenced by Iran's backing of Hamas, which could result in changes in alliances or modifications in foreign policy stances to either align with or distance from the parties involved. Continuing conflicts, particularly those rooted in religious or ideological differences, can fuel the process of radicalization. Although the direct consequences for the Indo-Pacific area may not be immediate, the proliferation of extremist beliefs, which are affected by the Israel-Hamas conflict, might potentially affect regional security and stability. The Middle East is experiencing escalations and instability, partly due to Iran's engagement in the Israel-Hamas war, which could lead to population displacements and migration.

The proximate consequences may be experienced in adjacent areas, but it could indirectly contribute to worldwide migratory patterns, especially moves towards the Indo-Pacific.

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