

## A REGIONAL SNAPSHOT OF THE ONGOING PALESTINIAN CRISIS

By  
**Arhama Siddiq**  
Research Fellow

*Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA), ISSI*

Edited by  
**Amina Khan**

December 27, 2023

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



On October 7, 2023, a significant turning point occurred in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict when the Al-Qassam Brigade, the military arm of Hamas, initiated an assault. In response, Israel declared a state of 'war' against Hamas, leading to a campaign marked by indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force against the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza. The human toll has been devastating, with over 20,000 lives lost and more than 1.9 million Palestinians displaced. As of 26 December, 2023, the death toll is almost 21000. Among these 70 percent are women and children according to the Gaza healthy ministry. <sup>1</sup>This escalation has prompted a reevaluation of international legal norms, the historical context of colonization, and the consequences of suppressing non-violent resistance through military means. Global mass protests and appeals from world leaders over the past month emphasize the urgent need to protect civilian lives and implement an immediate cease-fire.

The repercussions of this ongoing crisis are both regional and global. Palestine shares borders with Jordan to the east, and Egypt to the southwest. Its northern neighbors are Lebanon and Syria. The

<sup>1</sup> "Lose a limb or risk death? Growing numbers among Gaza's thousands of war-wounded face hard decisions," AP news, December 26, 2023.  
<https://apnews.com/article/gaza-israel-war-amputees-hospitals-overwhelmed-b5a452bbf2a27364aaff68cc71b51fc5>

broader regional context involves key players such as Turkiye, Iran, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, and Yemen. Influenced significantly by its geographic proximity to Gaza and the potential implications for its national interests, **Egypt's** stance underscores the pressing concern of an influx of refugees resulting from the ongoing conflict. Egypt harbors apprehensions that such an influx may introduce substantial security challenges, strain already limited resources, and potentially destabilize its social and political stability. The call for "voluntary migration" of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip by far-right Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has been deemed "irresponsible" by Egypt, as stated by Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, who characterized the statement as an expression of the Israeli government's policy violating international laws.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, Egypt is actively engaging in cease-fire efforts and extending humanitarian aid to those impacted by the Gaza conflict.<sup>3</sup>

**Jordan**, another neighboring country with deep historical ties to Palestine, is consistently advocating for an immediate cessation of violence, underlining the two-state solution as the sole viable path toward a peaceful resolution. On November 7, 2023, Prime Minister Bisher al Khasawneh of Jordan, in response to Israel's offensive in Gaza, stated that all options are on the table. This statement came days after the recall of Jordan's ambassador from Israel and the declaration of Israel's ambassador as *persona non grata*. Mr. Khasawneh criticized Israel's siege on Gaza, highlighting the indiscriminate nature of the attack on both civilian and military targets, including safe areas and ambulances.<sup>4</sup> Jordan's perspective emanates from its unique historical connection with Palestinian territories, including the West Bank, and its substantial Palestinian population, making the welfare of Palestinians a paramount concern. It must also not be forgotten that for decades, Jordan has been the custodian of Al Quds/Al Aqsa Mosque, and since the inception of the Hashemite Kingdom, the country's policy has been deeply rooted in the preservation and defence of the holy city of Jerusalem, along with its revered sites. Jordan is also actively aiding Gaza, with the World Food Program (WFP) recently announcing the delivery of 750 tons of food assistance through the Karam

---

<sup>2</sup> "Egypt Slams 'Irresponsible' Israeli Call for Displacement of Gaza's Population," Anadolu Agency, November 14, 2023. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/egypt-slams-irresponsible-israeli-call-for-displacement-of-gaza-s-population/3053622>.

<sup>3</sup> "Egypt 'Pushing to Accelerate Aid Delivery to Gaza,'" Middle East Monitor, December 7, 2023. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20231207-egypt-pushing-to-accelerate-aid-delivery-to-gaza/>.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Khalidi, Suleiman. "Jordan Open to 'all Options' as Gaza Conflict Intensifies." Reuters, November 6, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/jordan-says-all-options-open-gaza-conflict-intensifies-2023-11-06/>.

Abu Salem crossing. This reflects Jordan's ongoing commitment to supporting the humanitarian needs of the Gaza Strip.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, the unfolding crisis in Israel and Gaza poses a serious risk of spillover into **Lebanon**, given the enduring enmity between Israel and the influential Hezbollah. Lebanon is particularly vulnerable to being drawn into a full-scale conflict, as evidenced by the frequent exchanges of fire in recent weeks. It is worth noting that all major political parties in Lebanon have publicly expressed their desire to avoid war. Given Hezbollah's status as both a political and military actor, it is expected to act rationally, taking into account the interests of its constituents. Lebanon's perspective derives from its historical affiliation with the Palestinian cause and the intricate socio-political dynamics within the nation. The Lebanese government strives to strike a balance between supporting the Palestinian cause and addressing its own internal challenges. Furthermore, according to the World Bank, the impacts of the Israel-Hamas 'war' are poised to push crisis-hit Lebanon's economy back into recession, primarily attributing it to a "shock to tourism spending." The conflict along Lebanon's southern border, involving regular exchanges of fire between the Israeli army and Hezbollah, since the Gaza conflict erupted on October 7, has reversed a slight economic recovery for Lebanon. The country has been grappling with a deep economic crisis for years, as outlined in the report by the World Bank.<sup>6</sup>

On a broader regional scale, the Turkish government fervently condemns Israel's military actions in Gaza, characterizing them as extreme and disproportionate. **Turkiye** actively engages in humanitarian aid efforts for Gaza and vocalizes its call for international solidarity with Palestine. On October 20, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan issued a warning to Israel, cautioning against a potential ground invasion of Gaza. Simultaneously, Israeli diplomats were evacuated from Turkiye amidst ongoing anti-Israel protests throughout the country. President Erdogan, in a message posted on X (formerly known as Twitter), reiterated the call for the Israeli government to refrain from expanding attacks on civilians and urged an immediate cessation of operations, characterizing them as potentially amounting to genocide.<sup>7</sup> In increasingly stern rhetoric, the Turkish President has also condemned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, asserting that the latter would face trial as a

---

<sup>5</sup> "Jordan Dispatched 89 Trucks, 28 Planes with Aid to Gaza since Israeli War: Official," Anadolu Agency, December 21, 2023. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/jordan-dispatched-89-trucks-28-planes-with-aid-to-gaza-since-israeli-war-official-/3089285>.

<sup>6</sup> "Gaza war to throw Lebanon back into recession: World Bank," Arab News, December 21, 2023. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2429806/middle-east>

<sup>7</sup> "Turkey's Gaza Protests Continue as Erdogan Warns Israel against Ground Invasion." Al-Monitor: Independent, trusted coverage of the Middle East, October 23, 2023. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/10/turkeys-gaza-protests-continue-erdogan-warns-israel-against-ground-invasion>.

war criminal for Israel's Gaza Strip offensive and called for additional measures, urging the United Nations Human Rights Council and the International Criminal Court (ICC) to be involved.<sup>8</sup>

**Saudi Arabia**, historically aligned with the Arab League's support for Palestinian self-determination, has undergone evolution in recent years as it evidently explores ways for outreach with Israel amidst broader regional realignments. Saudi Arabia has underscored the necessity for de-escalation and the resumption of peace talks without too explicitly censuring Israel's military actions. However, despite continuing to express support for the Palestinian cause, Saudi Arabia strives to navigate a delicate equilibrium between its traditional stance and adapting to evolving regional dynamics. This approach is driven by a commitment to maintain regional stability and explore opportunities for diplomatic engagement with Israel. On October 20, during a meeting with the British prime minister, the Saudi crown prince strongly condemned attacks on civilians in Gaza, denouncing them as "heinous." He also expressed concern about the "dangerous repercussions" that could arise in the event of an escalation of the conflict between Israel and Hamas. Subsequently, on November 2, Saudi Arabia announced the launch of a fundraising campaign for war-torn Gaza, providing a rare opportunity for residents to demonstrate solidarity with Palestinians.<sup>9</sup> On November 10, 2023, Saudi Arabia hosted a joint meeting of the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and subsequently, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan declared the initiation of the ministerial committee tasked with formulating international actions to halt the Gaza war, with the first stop of the Riyadh Summit Ministerial Committee being China and the second stop being Russia.<sup>10</sup> On 30 November, they met at the UN headquarters in New York.

During the current conflict, **Qatar** has remained an ardent supporter of Palestine, both in the political and economic domains. The Qatari government has condemned Israeli actions in Gaza and provides substantial financial aid to support reconstruction initiatives. On November 5, Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman emphasized Qatar's ongoing role as a mediator for the release of prisoners. He highlighted that the persistent Israeli bombing exacerbates the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, adding complexity to the efforts aimed at securing the release of detainees.<sup>11</sup> Qatar also plays a mediating role by hosting the Hamas leadership in Doha

---

<sup>8</sup> "Erdogan Labels Netanyahu 'War Criminal' Over Gaza Offensive," Arise News, December 4, 2023.

<https://www.arise.tv/erdogan-labels-netanyahu-war-criminal-over-gaza-offensive/>

<sup>9</sup> "Amid Hushed Talk of War, Saudi Fundraises for Gaza." France 24, November 2, 2023.

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231102-amid-hushed-talk-of-war-saudi-fundraises-for-gaza>.

<sup>10</sup> Saudi Foreign Ministry, Twitter, November 18, 2023.

<https://twitter.com/KSAmofaEN/status/1725907393135964582>

<sup>11</sup> "Qatar Warns Continued Israeli Strikes against Gaza 'Complicates Prisoners Release,'" Anadolu Agency, November 5, 2023.

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/qatar-warns-continued-israeli-strikes-against-gaza-complicates-prisoners-release/3044043>.

and has previously sought to facilitate dialogue between Hamas and Israel. In November, Qatar brokered a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, leading to the exchange of prisoners from both sides. Under this deal, 86 Israeli women and children were exchanged for 240 Palestinian prisoners during a fragile, week-long truce. Additionally, Hamas released an additional 24 foreigners, primarily Thai workers, at a later stage.<sup>12</sup> However, the ceasefire ultimately fell through. Despite this setback, Qatar is continuing renewed diplomatic efforts to address the situation<sup>13</sup> and in its own way is emphasizing the plight of Palestinians. An example of this subtle advocacy occurred at the Doha Forum 2023, where Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar, awarded UNRWA the forum award.

Meanwhile, **Yemen**, mired in its own catastrophic conflict, continues solidarity with Palestine and criticizes Israel's military actions. The Yemeni government has steadfastly supported Palestinians, calling for an immediate ceasefire and international intervention to protect civilians. They've also emphasized the urgent need for increased international aid to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. On November 6, 2023, Yemen's internationally recognized government strongly criticized an Israeli minister's statement suggesting the use of a nuclear bomb on Gaza. The Yemeni government deemed the minister's "radical" remark as a substantial threat to Palestinians, highlighting the perceived hostility within the Israeli leadership. However, the rallying point for the fragmented country has come in the form of the October 31 announcement by Yahya Saree, a military spokesman for the Houthis, when he declared that the movement launched a "large number" of rockets, ballistic missiles, and drones towards Israel and officially entered the war in Gaza. He emphasized that more strikes would follow until Israeli aggression ceases, and Palestinians achieve victory. On December 20, 2023, the formation of "Operation Prosperity Guardian," a multinational maritime security initiative led by the US to protect Red Sea shipping from Houthi attacks, was announced. Involving 10 nations, including Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, and the UK, the task force seeks to deter and apprehend Houthi threats through naval patrols and surveillance. Despite this, the Houthis have asserted that it would not halt such attacks. Despite the operation's success in deterring certain Houthi attacks and enhancing patrols in the Red Sea, occasional assaults on commercial vessels by Houthi forces persist. At least 12 shipping companies, including major entities

---

<sup>12</sup> :“ Hamas refuses to discuss new hostage deal before ceasefire,” Financial Times, December 21, 2023. <https://www.ft.com/content/ba95dc0c-c5f1-45a0-98be-5659bf3898b9>

<sup>13</sup> “Hamas refuses to discuss new hostage deal before ceasefire,” Financial Times, December 21, 2023. <https://www.ft.com/content/ba95dc0c-c5f1-45a0-98be-5659bf3898b9>

like Mediterranean Shipping Company, CMA CGM, and AP Moller-Maersk, suspended transit through the Red Sea due to safety concerns. The latest addition to this list is the UK oil giant BP.<sup>14</sup>

**Iran** has consistently maintained its position as a vocal advocate for Palestine and a vehement critic of Israeli actions. The Iranian government perceives the conflict as a component of a broader struggle against 'Israeli occupation' and the suppression of Palestinian rights. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Raisi have vehemently condemned Israel's military actions, expressing unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian cause. On November 11, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi stated that the time for action in the conflict in Gaza had come, emphasizing the need for concrete measures rather than mere words. President Raisi underscored that Gaza should be a place of action rather than rhetoric.<sup>15</sup> Beyond the immediate humanitarian consequences, Iran regards the Gaza conflict as an integral part of a broader fight against what it considers Israeli aggression and the pervasive influence of Western powers in the region. On December 24, Iran hosted an international conference in Tehran to garner support for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, with the aim of lifting the blockade on Gaza and ensuring increased humanitarian aid for the region, according to a statement from the Iranian Foreign Ministry. The one-day Tehran International Conference on Palestine gathered officials, political figures, religious leaders, media representatives, and scholars from over 50 countries as part of Iran's diplomatic efforts to support the Palestinian cause. In a joint statement issued earlier on December 15, China, Saudi Arabia, and Iran called for the immediate cessation of military operations in Gaza and the provision of sustainable relief to Palestinians, following a meeting in Beijing to follow up on the reconciliation agreement known as the Beijing Agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The conflict in Gaza, within a broader regional context, has the potential to destabilize the entire Middle East. Continued violence raises the specter of Hezbollah opening a second front, and there is growing concern that it may escalate into a wider war involving multiple nations, particularly with the possibility of direct U.S. involvement, which would carry significant global implications. Already, the conflict's repercussions have extended to various regions, affecting the West Bank, Israel's northern border, the Red Sea, and areas in Iraq and Syria. Amid these multifaceted implications, one undeniable outcome is the renewed global resonance of the Palestinian cause. The resurgence of global interest in the Palestinian cause has brought to light significant disparities between public

---

<sup>14</sup> "Yemen's Houthis 'Will Not Stop' Red Sea Attacks until Israel Ends Gaza War." Al Jazeera, December 19, 2023.  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/19/yemens-houthis-will-not-stop-red-sea-attacks-until-israel-stops-gaza-war>.

<sup>15</sup> "Iran President Raisi Says Action, Not Words, Needed on Gaza," Reuters, November 11, 2023.  
<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-president-raisi-says-action-not-words-needed-gaza-2023-11-11/>.

sentiment and government positions, particularly in the United States and Europe. This is evident through the substantial number of protests witnessed in these regions. Despite Israel's efforts to suppress media coverage and employ extreme measures, its attempts have proven ineffective. Any prospects for further normalization with Israel have been indefinitely postponed, marking a shift in geopolitical dynamics. Concurrently, there is a noticeable emergence of powers such as China in the Middle East, altering the regional geopolitical landscape.

While all this transformation takes place, the people of Gaza continue to bear the brunt of Israeli wrath. Another chapter in Middle Eastern history is being written, yet again, with Palestinian blood. As Gaza's children keep becoming victims of Israel's merciless campaign, the scar on the conscience of humanity continues to grow bigger by the hour.