Historical Outlook of the Hamas/Israeli War: Lessons for Nigeria

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Abstract

The existence of conflict within or between nations is as old as time. Conflicts sometimes take the form of disagreements that lead to boycotts or confrontations, such as declared wars. The Israeli War with Palestine is one notorious situation that has remained adamant and unrelenting. In contemporary times, the Palestinian Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-Islāmiyyah (Hamas) – Israeli war has continued to attract international attention from both individual nations and committees of nations. The history of wars between Israel and its neighbours has remained an interesting study that is neither a tribal nor ethnic-based conflict, but that of legitimate survival and territorial occupation. The interventions by the United Nations (UN) have led to several suggested solutions, such as the creation of two separate states joined economically or the formation of a single binational state. The acceptance of these solutions has remained a mirage that has lingered to date. The Palestinian Hamas–Israeli war leaves a lot of lessons for Nigeria, whose boundaries are shared with four francophone nations. Supposing a similar conventional war erupts between Nigeria and one or an alliance of these francophone nations, would Nigeria be able to contain the aggression just as is the case with the Palestinian Hamas–Israeli experience? It is viewed, therefore, that there is a need for Nigeria to revamp her intelligence network system, rejig her foreign policy content, enlighten the civil society on the need to be vigilant, begin to robustly equip her armed forces as necessary, and heighten her border security with her francophone neighbours.

Keywords: *Conflict, war, Palestinian Hamas, Israel, foreign policy*

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Introduction

The existence of conflict within or between nations is as old as time. Conflicts sometimes take the form of disagreements leading to boycotts or confrontations in the form of declared wars. During this situation, lives are lost, infrastructure is destroyed, and women and children suffer while humanitarian conditions ensue. Some wars are quelled through dialogue, resulting in peace. However, others have persisted despite numerous interventions by both neighbours and the international community out of concern. Berger and Luckman (1966, cited in Dennen, 2005) are of the view that:

> Conflict is the incompatibility of interests, goals, values, needs, expectations, and social cosmologies (or ideologies). Ideological conflicts, in particular, tend to become malicious…

> … Conflict is an activity that takes place between conscious, though not necessarily rational, beings. It is defined in terms of the wants, needs, or obligations of the parties involved (Nicholson, 2009).

The Arab - Israeli War, especially the Israeli Wars with Palestine, is one notorious situation that has remained adamant and unrelenting—the wars between these two date back several decades. The Israeli side has continued to engage in severe fighting with Palestinian groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah militants in Palestine. This engagement resulted in numerous deaths, destruction, and maiming, resulting in the attention and concern of not only the affected sides but also the international community. One could begin to query the legitimacy of these wars vis-à-vis their potential end state. There is a sense in saying that issues of ethnic legitimacy have come to the fore as to whether either side of the divide should exist or not within the Middle East environment. Another issue is the deliberate rejection of tolerance, as well as hatred and acrimonious tendencies, as was buttressed by Sundby and Wasseff (2023), who posited that.

> The Hamas group is committed to armed resistance against Israel and the creation of an Islamic Palestinian state in Israel's place.

The existence of wars between the Arabs and Palestine (Hamas), as well as the Lebanese Hezbollah against Israel, has had a trend that has lasted from 1948 to date. The quiet periods in between this extended time of conflict were never friendly times, but a period of either cease-fire or times of diplomatic negotiations for peaceful co-existence. However, these periods could best be described as volatile times that existed on kegs of gunpowder ready to explode at short notice. This indeed best describes the recent war between Hamas in Palestine and the state of Israel, where bombardment with missiles has continued to cause massive death and destruction of infrastructure, especially in Palestine, as well as the deployment of blockades by Israel.

The Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-Islāmiyyah (Hamas), translated as the Islamic Resistance Movement, is a militant Palestinian nationalist and Islamist movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip that is dedicated to the establishment of an independent Islamic state in historical Palestine. Founded in 1987, Hamas opposed the secular approach of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and rejected attempts to cede any part of Palestine. From the late 1970s, activists connected with the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood established a network of charities, clinics, and

schools. They became active in the territories (the Gaza Strip and West Bank) occupied by Israel after the 1967 Six-Day War.

Figure 1.1 Map of Palestine

In Gaza, they were active in many mosques, while their activities in the West Bank were generally limited to the universities. The Muslim Brotherhood's activities in these areas were generally non-violent, but a number of small groups in the occupied territories began to call for jihad (holy war) against Israel. In December 1987, at the beginning of the Palestinian intifada (an Arabic term which means shaking off) uprising against Israeli occupation, Hamas (which also is an Arabic word meaning "zeal") was established by members of the Muslim Brotherhood and religious factions of the

PLO. The new organization quickly acquired a broad following. In its 1988 charter, Hamas maintained that Palestine is an Islamic homeland that can never be surrendered to non-Muslims and that waging holy war to wrest control of Palestine from Israel is a religious duty for Palestinian Muslims. This position brought it into conflict with the PLO, which in 1988 recognized Israel's right to exist.

Hamas soon began to act independently of other Palestinian organizations, generating animosity between the group and its secular nationalist counterparts. Increasingly violent Hamas attacks on civilian and military targets impelled Israel to arrest a number of Hamas leaders in 1989, including Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the movement's founder. In the years that followed, Hamas underwent reorganization to reinforce its command structure and locate key leaders out of Israel's reach. A political bureau responsible for the organization's international relations and fund-raising was formed in Amman, Jordan, electing Khaled Meshaal as its head in 1996, and the group's armed wing was reconstituted as the ʿIzz al-Dīn al-Qassām Forces. Jordan expelled Hamas leaders from Amman. In 1999, they accused them of using their Jordanian offices as a command post for military activities in the West Bank and Gaza. In 2001, the political bureau established a new headquarters in Damascus, Syria. It moved again in 2012 to Doha, Qatar, after leadership failed to support the Assad government in its crackdown on the Syrian uprising.

The group denounced the 1993 Peace Agreement between Israel and the PLO and, along with the Islamic Jihad group, subsequently intensified its terror campaign using suicide bombers. The PLO and Israel responded with harsh security and punitive measures. The PLO chairman, Yasser Arafat, seeking to include Hamas in the political process, appointed Hamas members to leadership positions

in the Palestinian Authority (PA). The collapse of peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians in September 2000 led to an increase in violence that came to be known as the Aqṣā intifada. That conflict was marked by a degree of violence unseen in the first intifada, and Hamas activists further escalated their attacks on Israelis and engaged in a number of suicide bombings in Israel itself. In the years after the Aqṣā intifada, Hamas began to moderate its views toward the peace process. After more than a decade of rejecting the foundational principles of the PA, Hamas ran in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections and subsequently participated in the PA, with indications that it would accept agreements between Israel and the PA. Since then, senior Hamas leaders have repeatedly stated their willingness to support a two-state solution based on pre-1967 borders. This willingness was enshrined in the 2017 Document of General Principles and Policies (Mindy, 2023).

Israel, officially known as the State of Israel, is a country in the Middle East, located at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It is bounded to the north by Lebanon, to the northeast by Syria, to the east and southeast by Jordan, to the southwest by Egypt, and to the west by the Mediterranean Sea. The state has an area of about 22,072 km^2 and an estimated population of 9,153,000 people. Jerusalem is the seat of government and the proclaimed capital, although the latter status has not received wide international recognition. Israel is a small country with a relatively diverse topography, consisting of a lengthy coastal plain, highlands in the north and central regions, and the Negev desert in the south. Running the length of the country from north to south along its eastern border is the northern terminus of the Great Rift Valley. The State of Israel is the only Jewish nation in the modern period, and the region that now falls within its borders has a lengthy and rich history that dates from prebiblical times. The area was a part of the Roman Empire and, later, the Byzantine Empire before falling under the control of the fledgling Islamic caliphate in the 7th century CE (Mindy, 2023).

Figure 1.2   **Map of Israel**

Although the object of a dispute during the Crusades, the region, then generally known as Palestine, remained under the sway of successive Islamic dynasties until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, when it was placed under British mandate from the League of Nations. Even before the mandate, the desire for a Jewish homeland prompted a small number of Jews to immigrate to Palestine, a migration that grew dramatically during the second quarter of the 20th century with the increased persecution of Jews

worldwide and the subsequent Holocaust perpetrated by Nazi Germany. This vast influx of Jewish immigrants into the region, however, caused tension with the native Palestinian Arabs, and violence flared between the two groups, leading up to the United Nations plan to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab sectors and Israel's ensuing declaration of statehood on 14 May 1948.

Israel fought a series of wars against neighbouring Arab states during the next 35 years, which have resulted in ongoing disputes over territory and the status of refugees. Despite continuing tensions, however, Israel concluded peace treaties with several neighbouring Arab states during the final quarter of the 20th century.

United Nations Resolution 181 of 1947 - A Call for the Creation of an Arab and a Jewish State
United Nations Resolution 181 is a resolution passed by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1947 that called for the partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, with the city of Jerusalem as a *corpus separatum* (Latin: "separate entity") to be governed by a special international regime. The resolution, which was considered by the Jewish community in Palestine to be a legal basis for the establishment of Israel, and which was rejected by the Arab community, was succeeded almost immediately by violence. Palestine had been governed by Great Britain since 1922. Since that time, Jewish immigration to the region had increased, and tensions between Arabs and Jews had grown. In April 1947, exhausted by World War II and increasingly intent upon withdrawing from the Middle East region, Britain referred the issue of Palestine to the UN. To find a suitable course of action, the UN formed the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), an inquiry committee made up of members from 11 countries. Ultimately, UNSCOP delivered two proposals: that of the majority, which recommended two separate states joined economically, and that of the minority, which supported the formation of a single binational state made up of autonomous Jewish and Palestinian areas.

Figure 1.3 UN Partition Plan for Palestine

Source: BBC News 2023

The Jewish community approved of the first of these proposals, while the Arabs opposed them both. A counterproposal – including a provision that only those Jews who had arrived before the Balfour

Declaration (and their descendants) would be citizens of the state – did not win Jewish favour. The proposal to partition Palestine, based on a modified version of the UNSCOP majority report, was put to a General Assembly vote on 29 November 1947. The fate of the proposal was initially uncertain. Still, after a period of intense lobbying by pro-Jewish groups and individuals, the resolution was passed with 33 votes in favour, 13 against, and 10 abstentions (Adam, 2023).

Historical Overview of the Arab - Israeli War
Arab-Israeli wars are a series of military conflicts between Israeli forces and various Arab forces, most notably in 1948 - 1949, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, and 2006. It is necessary to stress that these Arab forces are without the forces of Palestine.

Israel's War of Independence and the Palestinian Nakbah (1948 - 1949)
In November 1947, the United Nations (UN) voted to partition the British mandate of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state (United Nations Resolution 181). Clashes broke out almost immediately between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. As British troops prepared to withdraw from Palestine, conflict continued to escalate, with both Jewish and Arab forces committing belligerent acts. Among the most infamous events was the attack on the Arab village of Deir Yassin on 9 April 1948. The news of a brutal massacre there by Irgun Zvai Leumi and the Stern Gang forces spread widely and inspired both panic and retaliation. Days later, Arab forces attacked a Jewish convoy headed for Hadassah Hospital, killing 78 people (Adam, 2023).

On the eve of the British forces' withdrawal on 15 May 1948, Israel declared independence. The next day, Arab forces from Egypt, Transjordan (Jordan), Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon occupied the areas in southern and eastern Palestine not apportioned to the Jews by the UN partition of Palestine, then captured East Jerusalem, including the small Jewish quarter of the Old City. The stated purpose of the invasion was to restore law and order in light of British withdrawal, citing incidents such as that at Deir Yassin, and a growing refugee crisis in neighbouring Arab countries. The Israelis, meanwhile, won control of the main road to Jerusalem through the Yehuda Mountains ("Hills of Judaea") and successfully repulsed repeated Arab attacks. By early 1949, the Israelis had managed to occupy all of the Negev up to the former Egypt-Palestine frontier, except for the Gaza Strip (Adam, 2023).

Between February and July 1949, separate armistice agreements between Israel and each of the Arab states fixed a temporary frontier between Israel and its neighbours. In Israel, the war is remembered as the War of Independence. In the Arab world, it came to be known as the Nakbah (or Nakba; "Catastrophe") because of the large number of refugees and displaced persons resulting from the war.

The Suez Crisis (1956)
Tensions mounted again with the rise to power of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, a staunch Pan-Arab nationalist who took a hostile stance toward Israel. In 1956, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, a vital waterway connecting Europe and Asia that was primarily owned by French and British concerns. France and Britain responded by striking a deal with Israel, whose ships were barred from using the canal and whose southern port of Eilat had been blockaded by Egypt, wherein Israel would invade Egypt; France and Britain would then intervene, ostensibly as peacemakers, and take control of the canal. In October 1956, Israel invaded Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. In five days, the Israeli army captured Gaza, Rafaḥ, and Al-ʿArīsh—taking thousands of prisoners—and occupied most of the peninsula east of the Suez Canal. The Israelis were then in a position to open sea communications through the Gulf of Aqaba. In December, after the joint Anglo-French intervention, a UN Emergency

Force was stationed in the area, and Israeli forces withdrew in March 1957. Though Egyptian forces had been defeated on all fronts, the Suez Crisis, as it is sometimes known, was seen by Arabs as an Egyptian victory. Egypt dropped the blockade of Elat. A United Nations buffer force was placed in the Sinai Peninsula (Adam, 2023).

Six-Day War (1967)

Arab and Israeli forces clashed for the third time between 5 and 10 June 1967, in what came to be called the Six-Day War (or June War). In early 1967, Syria intensified its bombardment of Israeli villages from positions in the Golan Heights. When the Israeli Air Force shot down six Syrian MiG fighter jets in reprisal, Nasser mobilized his forces near the Sinai border. Dismissing the UN force there, he again sought to blockade Elat. In May 1967, Egypt signed a mutual defense pact with Jordan. Israel answered this apparent Arab rush to war by staging a sudden air assault, destroying Egypt's air force on the ground. The Israeli victory on the ground was overwhelming. Israeli units drove back Syrian forces from the Golan Heights, took control of the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, and drove Jordanian forces from the West Bank. Importantly, the Israelis were left in sole control of Jerusalem (Adam, 2023).

Yom Kippur War (1973)

The sporadic fighting that followed the Six-Day War again developed into full-scale war in 1973. On 6 October, the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur (thus, "Yom Kippur War"), Israel was caught off guard by Egyptian forces crossing the Suez Canal and by Syrian forces crossing into the Golan Heights. The Arab armies showed greater aggressiveness and fighting ability than in the previous wars, and the Israeli forces suffered heavy casualties. The Israeli army, however, reversed many of its early losses and pushed its way into Syrian territory. It also encircled the Egyptian Third Army by crossing the Suez Canal and establishing forces on its west bank. Still, it never regained the seemingly impenetrable fortifications along the Suez Canal that Egypt had destroyed in its initial successes. The fighting, which lasted through the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, came to an end on October 26. Israel signed a formal cease-fire agreement with Egypt on November 11 and with Syria on May 31, 1974. A disengagement agreement between Israel and Egypt, signed on 18 January 1974, provided for Israeli withdrawal into the Sinai west of the Mitla and Gidi passes, while Egypt was to reduce the size of its forces on the east bank of the canal. A UN peacekeeping force was established between the two armies. This agreement was supplemented by another, signed on 4 September 1975.

On 26 March 1979, Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty formally ending the state of war that had existed between the two countries for 30 years. Under the terms of the treaty, which had resulted from the Camp David Accords signed in 1978, Israel returned the entire Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, and, in return, Egypt recognized Israel's right to exist. The two countries subsequently established normal diplomatic relations (Adam, 2023).

Lebanon War (1982)

On 5 June 1982, less than six weeks after Israel's complete withdrawal from the Sinai, increased tensions between Israelis and Palestinians resulted in the Israeli bombing of Beirut and southern Lebanon, where the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) had a number of strongholds. The following day, Israel invaded Lebanon, and by 14 June, its land forces reached as far as the outskirts of Beirut, which was encircled. Still, the Israeli government agreed to halt its advance and begin negotiations with the PLO. After much delay and massive Israeli shelling of West Beirut, the

PLO evacuated the city under the supervision of a multinational force. Eventually, Israeli troops withdrew from west Beirut, and the Israeli army withdrew entirely from Lebanon by June 1985.

Second Lebanon War (2006)
In July 2006, Hezbollah launched an operation against Israel in an attempt to pressure the country into releasing Lebanese prisoners, killing a number of Israeli soldiers in the process and capturing two. Israel launched an offensive into southern Lebanon to recover the captured soldiers. The war lasted 34 days but left more than one thousand Lebanese dead and about one million others displaced. Several Arab leaders criticized Hezbollah for inciting the conflict. Nevertheless, Hezbollah's ability to fight the Israel Defense Forces to a standstill won it praise throughout much of the Arab world (Adam, 2023).

Historical Overview of the Hamas-Israeli War

In early 2005, Mahmoud Abbas, president of the PA, and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced a suspension of hostilities as Israel prepared to withdraw troops from some Palestinian territories. After much negotiation, Hamas agreed to the cease-fire, although sporadic violence continued. Later that year, Israel unilaterally dismantled settlements and withdrew troops from the Gaza Strip. In the 2006 elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, Hamas won a surprise victory over Fatah, capturing the majority of seats. The two groups eventually formed a coalition government, with Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas as prime minister. Clashes between Hamas and Fatah forces in the Gaza Strip intensified, however, prompting Abbas to dissolve the Hamas-led government and declare a state of emergency in June 2007. Hamas was left in control of the Gaza Strip, while a Fatah-led emergency cabinet had control of the West Bank. In April 2011, Hamas and Fatah officials announced that the two sides had reached a reconciliation agreement in negotiations mediated by Egypt. The agreement, signed in Cairo on May 4, called for the formation of an interim government to organize legislative and presidential elections. After months of negotiations over the leadership of the interim government, the two parties announced in February 2012 that they had selected Abbas for the post of interim president.

Hamas's relations with the governments of Syria and Iran, two of its primary sources of support, were strained in 2011 when Hamas leaders in Damascus conspicuously avoided expressing support for a crackdown by Syrian armed forces against anti-government protesters inside the country. In early 2012, Hamas leaders left Syria for Egypt and Qatar and then publicly declared their support for the Syrian opposition. Iranian support for Hamas, which by some estimates had exceeded $200 million a year, was significantly reduced. The Hamas government in the Gaza Strip, still struggling following the cutoff of Iranian aid, was placed under even greater financial strain in 2013 when the administration of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, was overthrown and replaced by a military-led interim government hostile to Hamas. The new administration heavily restricted crossings at the border between Gaza and Egypt and shut down most of the smuggling tunnels that had been a significant source of tax revenue for Hamas as well as a primary means of supplying a wide variety of goods to the Gaza Strip. By late 2013, Hamas was struggling to pay the wages of public sector employees in the Gaza Strip.

In April 2014, Hamas effectively renounced its governing role in the Gaza Strip by agreeing with Fatah to the formation of a new PA cabinet composed entirely of nonpartisan ministers. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denounced the new agreement, accusing Fatah of seeking reconciliation with Hamas at the expense of a possible peace agreement with Israel. The new cabinet was sworn in

on 2 June but was left unable to carry out the administration of the Gaza Strip. Hamas continued to administer the area, even forming an interim administrative committee in 2017. Later that year, the PA began to take over, but, as it was unable to take complete control, it cut its funding for the Gaza Strip in 2018 and imposed sanctions. Hamas sought to alleviate the blow through taxation, but the move to tax the already poverty-stricken population was unpopular and led to frequent protests. Funding from Qatar and the easing of some blockade restrictions by Israel brought some relief to the Gaza Strip.

After Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, Israel declared the Gaza Strip under Hamas a hostile entity. It approved a series of sanctions that included power cuts, heavily restricted imports, and border closures. Hamas attacks on Israel continued, as did Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip. After months of negotiations, in June 2008, Israel and Hamas agreed to implement a truce scheduled to last six months; however, the truce was threatened shortly thereafter as each accused the other of violations, which escalated in the last months of the agreement. On 19 December, the truce officially expired amidst accusations of violations on both sides. Broader hostilities erupted shortly thereafter as Israel, responding to sustained rocket fire, mounted a series of air strikes across the region, among the strongest in years, meant to target Hamas. After a week of air strikes, Israeli forces initiated a ground campaign into the Gaza Strip amid calls from the international community for a cease-fire. Following more than three weeks of hostilities, in which perhaps more than 1,000 were killed and tens of thousands were left homeless, Israel and Hamas each declared a unilateral cease-fire.

Beginning on 14 November 2012, Israel launched a series of air strikes in Gaza in response to an increase in the number of rockets fired from Gaza into Israeli territory over the previous nine months. The head of the ʿIzz al-Dīn al-Qassām Forces, Ahmed Said Khalil al-Jabari, was killed in the initial strike. Hamas retaliated with increasing rocket attacks on Israel, and hostilities continued until Israel and Hamas reached a cease-fire agreement on 21 November. In 2014, tensions between Israel and Hamas rose following the disappearance of three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank on 12 June. Netanyahu accused Hamas of having abducted the youths and vowed not to let the crime go unpunished.

Israeli security forces launched a massive sweep in the West Bank to search for the missing boys and to crack down on members of Hamas and other militant groups; several hundred Palestinians suspected of having militant ties were arrested, including several leaders of Hamas in the West Bank. On 30 June, the boys were found dead in the West Bank, outside of Hebron. In the Gaza Strip, the atmosphere of heightened tension led to an increase in rocket attacks on Israel by Islamic Jihad and other Palestinian militants. Those had been relatively infrequent since the 2012 cease-fire, but by late June 2014, rocket launches and Israeli reprisals had become a daily occurrence. On 30 June, in response to these reprisals, Hamas fired its first rockets into Israel since the cease-fire. By 8 July, Israel commenced a large-scale offensive in the Gaza Strip, using aerial bombing, missiles, and mortar fire to destroy a variety of targets that it claimed were associated with militant activity. After more than a week of bombardment failed to halt rocket fire from the Gaza Strip, Israeli forces launched a ground assault to destroy tunnels and other elements of the militants' infrastructure. In early August, Israeli leaders declared that the ground operation had fulfilled its mission, and Israeli troops and tanks pulled back from the Gaza Strip. Israeli air strikes continued, as did rocket and mortar attacks on Israel from the Gaza Strip.

After agreeing to several short-term cease-fires throughout the conflict, Israeli and Palestinian leaders reached an open-ended cease-fire in late August. In exchange for the cessation of rocket fire from the Gaza Strip, Israel agreed to loosen restrictions on goods entering the Gaza Strip, expand the fishing zone off the coast, and reduce the size of the security buffer it enforced in areas adjacent to the Israeli

border. Despite the high Palestinian death toll—estimated at more than 2,100—and widespread destruction in the Gaza Strip, Hamas leaders declared victory, trumpeting their ability to withstand Israeli attacks. A series of border protests in Gaza in 2018, in which demonstrators attempted to cross the border into Israel and sent incendiary kites and balloons into Israel, was met with a violent response by Israel. The situation reached a peak on 14 May when about 40,000 people participated in the protests. Many of the protesters attempted to cross the border at once, and Israeli soldiers opened fire, killing about 60 people and wounding some 2,700 others. The violence continued to escalate, leading to Israeli air strikes and Hamas rocket fire into Israel. The fighting lasted several months and ended with a truce in November. Discussions for maintaining peace remained ongoing in the following years, even during periods of escalation, and led to the occasional easing of restrictions on the Gaza Strip. In May 2021, tensions in Jerusalem boiled over and led to the most significant escalation of violence since 2014. After clashes between Israeli police and Palestinian protesters left hundreds injured, Hamas launched rockets into Jerusalem and southern and central Israel, prompting air strikes from Israel in response.

The Recent Invasion by Hamas on Israel

On 7 October 2023, Hamas launched a coordinated land, sea, and air assault that took Israel by surprise. Within hours, hundreds of Israelis were reported killed or missing. This was reported as the deadliest day for Israel in decades, during which more than 100 people were taken hostage. Of note is that this date was the day for the celebration of the Passover feast (one of the holiest days in Judaism known as Simchat Torah), which involved all citizens except those on essential duties. Thus, most of the eagle-eyed intelligence spots and deployments around Israel were caught napping when this invasion ensued. Of course, the invasion obstructed the celebration and further caused an immediate and spontaneous reaction by Israel against Hamas in Palestine. The invasion visited Israel with sporadic bombardment of missiles, attacks on Israeli citizens in Gaza, as well as its outpost deployments. The bombardment destroyed Israeli infrastructure, buildings, and inflicted injuries on many.

Reacting to these imminent threats, the Israeli government assessed the circumstances, the invasion, and the extent of actions and casualties inflicted on it by the Palestinian Hamas. To this end, the Israeli government declared total war on Hamas and responded to their actions through a barrage of indirect bombardments of missiles into Palestine. These indirect bombardments have continued with resultant effects of infrastructural destruction, killing and maiming of citizens in Palestine, as well as destruction of all pinpointed targets known to be those occupied by Hamas or those suspected to be accommodating Hamas members. So far, the Israeli forces have grossly awakened and have unleashed their complete instruments of war against the Palestinian Hamas. Alongside the bombardments, the Israeli forces have created blockades around Gaza and Palestine, cutting off all logistic supplies into Gaza and Palestine, depriving them of all humanitarian aid, water, electricity, fuel, medics, and so on, with the achievement of total darkness in Gaza while aerial bombardment persists.

This Israeli-Hamas war has attracted the attention of the international community and organizations. While the United Nations has continued to call for a peaceful resolution of the problem and has sought permission to move humanitarian aid to victims in Gaza from Israel, the United States of America, Germany, and several other nations have remained resolute in support of Israel. The United States of America has backed its support with the shipment of munitions and armament to Israel for the execution of the war. It is also reported that United States air platforms have remained on standby at the AFRICOM base in Germany, ready to support Israel by air on call. The Israeli defence force has also called back over 300,000 reservists and rolled out Israeli defence platforms with which it intends

to execute this long-awaited war, in which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that "the war against Hamas will change the Middle East".

Several Arab countries were directly accused of supporting the actions of the Palestinian Hamas. These countries were Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. While Iraq has responded to the accusation by stating that they are oblivious to the actions of Hamas on Israel, it has not supported their actions in any form. Hezbollah of Lebanon reiterated its support for Hamas and also bombarded southern Israel with missiles, which it announced and took responsibility for. Israel has subsequently responded appropriately, capturing and taking charge of its southern region while expanding into Lebanon against Hezbollah. Other Arab nations mentioned above have remained silent as to their support or involvement in the Hamas invasion against Israel. It is necessary to observe, however, that the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has also not reacted either in words or in action concerning the action of Hamas against the State of Israel.

Possible Analytical Outcome of the Invasion

The United Nations is an organization whose ultimate interest is to ensure and uphold global peace and security. It is in line with this that it mediates in the face of crisis between nations in order to avoid ugly humanitarian situations and possible genocide. This was the situation in 1947 when, in its Resolution 181, it presented two options as a solution to resolve the Palestine/Israeli crisis. Neither of the two options was accepted by the Arabs, whose adamant position was to exterminate the State of Israel from existence in the Middle East as one of the sovereign nations existing therein and for Palestine to continue to occupy the Israeli territory (Mindy, 2023). Thus, several wars ensued, which have lasted to date. On 6 October 1973, Israel was attacked and invaded by the Arab nations. During this situation, lives were lost and several infrastructures were destroyed. The attack took Israel by surprise because the country was celebrating one of its holiest days, known as Yom Kippur, during which all households were to be together in their homes for the occasion. This depleted and created a gap in the Israeli Intelligence operational watch; as such, they suffered a great deal of attacks. War ensued during which Israel defeated the Arabs, capturing Gaza amongst other land masses and bringing it under their control.

On 7 October 2003, the attack on Israel by the Palestinian Hamas took a similar tone, leaving many Israelis dead, some captured, and several infrastructures destroyed through direct attacks and the launching of aerial bombardments of missiles. Just as it reacted in 1973, the Israeli Defence Force launched a counterattack through both aerial bombardments and ground attacks, thus leaving the Gaza Strip in desolate rubble. Suffice it to say that the refusal and rejection of a two-state existence in the Middle East connotes a rejection of the desired peace by Palestine and all the Arab states. As many as two options were available, but the UN presented no alternative consideration. Instead, the only option was "a non-existence and non-accommodation of the Israeli State in the Middle East," which never succeeded. To date, what has remained on the front burner of the Arab environment and within the confines of Palestine, based on available historical evidence, could be deduced as a display of inherent hatred and a wish for the cleansing/extermination of the State of Israel, due to its occupation by Palestine (Mindy, 2023).

An obvious historical fact on the Arab/Israeli conflict is that confrontations have always been initiated by the Arabs (like Hamas and Hezbollah). What this does is that it attracts reprisal attacks by Israel, whose impact would always be destructive to both lives and properties, as is the case in the ongoing Hamas-Israel war. Peace in the Middle East seems far from being possible. However, collective will, love, tolerance, and a lack of condemnation and acrimony would be needed to achieve it. Therefore,

there is a need for the world body (UN) to be practically decisive at this point to enforce a two-state existence of Palestine and Israel in the Middle East. It will also be necessary to impress on the two states to sheath their swords and embrace peace or face the consequences of a global, stringent sanction. It would also be necessary for the UN to outlaw any terrorist group, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, from existence, just like ISIS was treated. This would serve as a deterrent to other existing or "would-be" groups.

Observed Lessons from the Hamas–Israeli War

The Hamas–Israeli war has brought to the fore observed lessons which are viewed as outstandingly remarkable for study. These lessons include the show of act of patriotism, impromptu alliances by Arab nations, protection of national interest, closure of the border by Egypt, conversion of the war into a proxy war, an assumptively deceptive intelligence system by Israel, and an assumptive conspiracy theory.

The Show of Act of Patriotism and Protection of National Interest

The declaration of war by Israel against Hamas has attracted unprecedented solidarity and support from Israeli citizens in diaspora. This is in terms of ensuring that Israel continues to occupy its territory as a sovereign nation. Their support is not just by mere words of encouragement and contribution of resources for the propagation of the war, but extended to their physical return to their fatherland to join in the war against Hamas. The Hamas exodus for this purpose can best be described as a show of patriotism to their country and her impending course of action, to which they intend to participate willingly and wholeheartedly without being prompted or coerced. This indeed has revealed patriotism to be a virtue which should be inherent rather than imbibed through artificial means, which includes ideological imputation. Additionally, the show of patriotism by Israelis in diaspora is a reflection of the fact that the protection of Israel as a nation state, as well as all its resources (both human and other resources), remains a matter of national interest that must be secured by all means against any threat. Thus, their deliberate effort for this purpose, including the Israeli government's stand, remains a matter of both vital and national interest to both Israelis within the country and those in diaspora. It is an objective whose attainment remains an effort by all, regardless of residential locations and boundaries.

Impromptu Alliances by Arab Nations

The Hamas–Israeli war has continued to attract the attention of the committee of nations as well as individual countries whose wish is for a possible ceasefire and round table dialogue on the issue. Some of the nations that have continued to show concern, especially on the devastating effects on Palestinian citizens, infrastructure, goods, and services in Gaza, are the Arab countries around the two fighting nations. These countries include Iran, Lebanon, Yemen, Jordan, and Egypt, among others. They have continued to cry out about the devastation in Gaza caused by Israel's reprisal attacks and have recently swung to join Hamas in the fight against Israel. It is the view of this paper that this form of alliance can only do more harm, cause more destruction, and create long-term enmity than good and friendliness. The expectations, however, would have been for them to intervene realistically to curb more devastation from and by either side by a show of neutrality. Aligning with either side would only instigate alliances from friendly forces, either by religion or interest, in which the outcome would not only be suffered by the two warring nations but also by other nations of the world economically, politically, diplomatically, and socially. Suffice it to mention, however, that the effects or consequences of unhealthy alliances could be counterproductive to world peace and security instead of enhancing neighbourliness and inter-nation cohesion.

Closure of the Border by Egypt

Egypt was proactive in avoiding the resultant consequences of the Hamas–Israeli war. It was possibly anticipated that the war could lead to a severe humanitarian crisis and a massive exodus or migration of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip into Egypt, thereby resulting in a refugee crisis. Hence, Egypt closed its borders accordingly (NPR, 2023). Although this view could realistically be accepted as a normal reaction from either a neutral party or a nation that wishes not to be joined to the war, other schools of thought in academia are of varying opinions. Some viewed it as a deliberate action by Egypt not to allow the Palestinians to flee from Gaza and give up the territory to Israel. During an interview with NPR (2023), Egyptian diplomat Abdehrahman Salaheldin defined the Egyptian action in this manner and further elaborated that it was an encouraging action and factor to cause Palestinians to remain and possibly fight for their land. These two views are heavily contrasting, but this paper believes that the Egyptian border closure was based on the national interest of Egypt and not for external services or support.

Conversion of the War into a Proxy War

Owing to the recent alliance of Arab nations in support of Hamas, the United States of America (USA), amongst other Western and European nations, has continued to show alliance with Israel. It is anticipated that Iran's friendship with Russia could drive support for Hamas by Russia, thus resulting in a "proxy war" between the two world superpowers (USA and Russia). As much as this may not be wishfully anticipated, the playing out of a conspiracy alliance may not be far-fetched. This would, however, possibly mean that if the Hamas-Israeli war is not curtailed, there could be the likelihood of a swift dovetailing of the war into a third world war, which, of course, would be globally devastating with costly effects. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure the avoidance of a proxy war. Instead, efforts should be channeled towards ensuring lasting peace and security in the Middle East and specifically between the warring Hamas and Israel.

Lessons for Nigeria

Nigeria is a country in the West African subregion of the African continent. Its total area is 923,769 km2, and its estimated population was about 230,842,743 people as of 2023 (World Factbook, 2023).

Figure 1.4   Map of Nigeria Showing Its Borders and Immediate Neighbours

Source: Geology.com

Nigeria, as a country, has continued to harmoniously exist, cooperate, and interact with its francophone neighbours economically, socially, and diplomatically. In fact, she has severally extended hands of assistance to Niger, Benin, Chad and Cameroon in diverse areas that would foster brotherhood and friendliness as well as meeting the needs of the populace of each country. These are in terms of infrastructure and diplomatic needs. Despite all of these, there have also been times when Nigeria has had differences that resulted in declared wars against some of the countries, such as Chad in the 1980s and Cameroon in the 1990s (the Bakassi War).

Based on the happenings between the Palestinian Hamas and Israel, it has become urgently necessary for Nigeria to review and recalibrate her foreign policy especially as it relates to her immediate neighbours, military stands and preparedness in terms of robust training and equipment capacity for not just the contemporary asymmetric warfare, but for a possible resurgence of inter-state conventional war. Cyberspace and nuclear warfare (NBC), especially those of a gaseous nature, would have to be intensively studied and trained so as to be prepared for possible envisaged or unforeseen attacks. Robust equipment procurement for all arms of services and corps of the Nigerian Army (NA) will boost the regional strength of the NA against any state. This was the case when the Nigerian Army intervened in the Liberia/Sierra Leone crisis and ensured the return of peace and tranquility to the two conflict-torn states. Therefore, it would be apt for Nigeria to begin to strengthen its national defence mechanism against any external aggression massively, be it from a state or an alliance of states.

The state of Nigeria's borders with its francophone neighbours calls for concern following the porous and largely undemarcated nature of the border; thus, the need to heighten border security cannot be overemphasized. This could be achieved by ensuring adequate demarcations, manning (both by human and electronic means), and strict monitoring to prevent illegal and illicit passage, which includes smuggling through her borders into the country. Additionally, owing to the fact that the various regions of Nigeria's borders with her francophone neighbours have different geographical structures and terrain, it would be necessary to ensure that the various regions are robustly occupied by massive equipment specialized to function within the given geographical description.

Ways Forward

1.   The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the office of the National Security Adviser, should activate all proactive instruments of the nation's intelligence hub as a matter of urgency and vital importance to the state. This would ensure early warning, proactive actions, reactions, and interventions, as well as expose the aggressor's intentions early enough to allow for adequate strategic decisions and appropriate operational interdiction response in defence of the nation's territorial integrity by the Armed Forces of Nigeria.

2.   The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, should be diplomatically wary and sensitively decisive in its inter-state relations with Nigeria's immediate neighbours. This is necessary, bearing in mind that our concern should be our interest and not permanent friendship.

3.   The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Ministry of Defence, should commence a robust assessment of the platforms of the Nigerian Armed Forces. This is with the aim of immediately commencing deliberate equipping of the Armed Forces of Nigeria to meet unforeseen threats and circumstances from all sides of the nation's borders.

4.   The Federal Government of Nigeria should, through the National Orientation Agency, direct the conduct of a robust enlightenment campaign on tacit observation and information collection by citizens, especially those living at the nation's borders. The information should describe any illicit actions or activities observed from the nation's neighbouring states/countries.

5.   The nation's borders with our francophone neighbours should be appropriately and deliberately demarcated with early warning alarm systems. This could be achieved through the deployment of sophisticated ICT equipment and gadgets, which would need to be manned around the clock by experts.

6.   The agencies deployed for border security (the Nigeria Customs Service, Nigeria Immigration Service, Nigeria Police Force, etc.) should be well-framed, vigilant, and professional in the execution of their functions. They should be decisive in their reporting and deliberate in their actions to ensure the security of the nation's borders.

7.   Specific-to-terrain equipment should be purchased for the achievement of robust reaction against any aggression from all sides of Nigeria's geographical borders with her francophone neighbours.

Conclusion

The Palestinian Hamas-Israeli war remains a conflict that has lasted for decades. Somehow, different schools of thought have viewed it from various directions. While some viewed it as a diplomatic war, others have remained on the stream of war of existence. This paper, therefore, views the war as a war of legitimacy and territorial occupation. Viewed from all sides, it is necessary to observe that it is actually a war that has caught the interest of the international community, where ideal solutions are being sought. So far, the ideal solution that has continued to echo even within the circumference of a round table dialogue is the United Nations' call for the establishment of a 2-state solution within the region between the Israelis and the Palestinians as was initiated in the UN resolution 181 of 1947(to be modified due to present day development in the region). This has remained a point of debate, disagreement, context, and challenge even in the face of this recent war. It is believed, however, that the thrust of the effect of the war, which rests on humanitarian crisis, primarily as it affects women and children, would create the enabling attention to all for a viable solution to quell the war in the region.

An obvious view, which this paper could describe as rather unfortunate, is the fact that Hamas' actions are yet to be condemned by any Arab nation in the Middle East, and surprisingly, the United Nations, whose aim is to ensure world peace and security. This stance has made Hamas dogged in their actions against Israel, as well as a feeling of legitimate rights in their actions despite the innocence of their victims on 7 October 2023. While this situation is a case on this front, Israel's retaliatory actions have continued to be viewed as inhumane, vindictive, intrusive on rights, and a sin against humanity. Comparatively, the questions to be asked remain: Would it be wrong to fight against an intruder whose aim is to exterminate innocent, peaceful people? Would it also be wrong to go against perceived harm that could be imposed and create insecurity in the future? Would a deliberate war against a deliberate intruder become an intrusion on fundamental rights? Who then is the intruder? Is it the invader or the defender? All of these questions come to mind when one begins to view global positions which appear to take the form of incomplete viewing of situations, quick unobjective conclusions which remain one sided as well as inability of nation states across the world to call and sound the need for Hamas to see its action as deplorable especially against innocent unarmed citizens. There is a need for truth and an approach to it to be seamless, sincere, objective, and mission-aligned towards ensuring peace and security in any region of the world. Just a simple 'I am sorry' could have possibly ameliorated and saved the escalated situation.

To our dear nation, Nigeria, where there are several crises in almost all the states in the country or all the geo-political zones of the nation, political and socio-economic tolerance, acceptance, and inter-regional cooperation would remain the key instrument for peace and security. In this way, strong bonding would be created to stand against any incursion into Nigeria from possible external aggressors, none of which is perceived to come from our francophone neighbours, possibly. Nigeria must remain cohesive, as shown by the Armed Forces of Nigeria, which has a total representation of the country's entities. Thus, the Federal Government of Nigeria owes it a duty to ensure national cohesion. It must extend to adequately equipping the Armed Forces of Nigeria and other necessary paramilitary organisations, not to fight against itself or amongst each other, but to protect the nation against perceived external threats.

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