

THE WIDER WORLD

Geopolitical Fallout Follows Outbreak of  
War in Israel

By Diane Chido  
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*Contributor's note: This is the second part of an effort to contextualize the violence engulfing Israel this month. The [first essay](#) provided an overview of the history of the conflict in Palestine to better understand how this complex set of social factors has developed over time. It was filed before a missile of disputed origin exploded outside a hospital in Gaza, igniting protests throughout the Middle East, and before President Biden returned from Israel and was slated to talk to the nation Thursday night.*

The undisputed facts are that on October 6, the Islamic extremist group Hamas made a three-pronged attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip, from land, sea, and air. The news media has documented ongoing death and casualty tolls of hundreds of civilians on each side, and Israel reported Monday that 199 Israeli hostages are held in Gaza. Israel and Egypt reportedly agreed to allow humanitarian aid in southern Gaza but it had not been delivered by Thursday and the threat remained imminent for an Israeli ground invasion by an estimated 300,000 troops. Israel has told 1 million civilian residents of Gaza to evacuate, but it appeared that Hamas was blocking such movement. This is our starting point. In addition, Hamas and Israel continued shelling Israel into Thursday.

There are also complex regional and international implications of this event that deserve exploration, some of them internal to the situation and some external. We will begin with the internal issues.

As the previous essay noted, the land of Palestine is largely populated by approximately 7 million Jewish Israelis and 2 million Muslim Arabs. This Arab population is generally lumped together as Palestinians, as they are mainly non-Jews, and non-Christians living within the territory of Israel. There is no Palestinian ethnic group. These Arabs just happen to live in a place historically and geographically called Palestine.

Palestinians in Palestine all live within the territory of the nation of Israel, thus, for the purposes of United Nations data collection, for instance, they too are Israelis. However, while most may have permanent residency status, they are not citizens, cannot vote, and are not issued Israeli passports. In addition, there are some people of Arab ethnicity who are also Jewish in terms of their religious faith. So, even basic definitions are complex in this region.

For simplicity here, we will use the terms Israelis for Jewish citizens of Israel and Palestinians for largely Muslim Arabs living in Israel proper or in the three Palestinian regions: the Gaza Strip, the West Bank of the Jordan River, and the Golan Heights, as shown in the map.<sup>[i]</sup> Note also that many Palestinians also live in Israeli cities with mixed populations but generally in segregated neighborhoods. The Golan Heights, marked with an oval at the top of the map, was also captured from Syria by Israeli forces in the 1967 Six-Day War, and was formally annexed in 1981, thus, it is not highlighted as part of “Palestine,” as it has been heavily settled by Israelis and is viewed internationally as part of Israel, except by Syria, of course.

[i] “Political Map of Palestine,” World Atlas, available [here](#), accessed on October 13, 2023.



*Political Map of Palestine with partitioned areas marked*

For decades, Israelis and Palestinians have lived and worked together, and many from both groups actively work toward peace and reconciliation in their daily lives. The difficult parts are those highlighted in yellow on the map, which are partitioned from Israel proper, including the area of East Jerusalem. Gaza was administered by Egypt from 1948 until 1967 when it was taken over by Israel. It has been independently administered by the Palestinian Authority since the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords. The West Bank was part of Jordan until 1967 and many residents hold Jordanian citizenship or passports or both.

The Palestinian Authority had been mainly run by Fatah, a political party advocating peace. In 2005, Israel withdrew its Army and civilian Jewish settlers as part of a continuing peace process. In 2006, the Authority called for elections, in which Hamas candidates defeated the Fatah party and won a majority of seats in parliament. This resulted in factional fighting in which an estimated 600 Palestinians were killed. Rarely do you find monolithic societies unless this is imposed from above, as in North Korea or the Peoples' Republic of China.

Hamas is a combination of words based on the group's official name in Arabic, translated as the Islamic Resistance Movement. It was originally established as a religious charity in 1971 but became increasingly political and militant in the late 1980s. It opposed Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yasser

Arafat's efforts at reconciliation with Israel and was listed by the U.S. Department of State officially as a terrorist organization on October 8, 1997, along with 12 other groups.<sup>[iii]</sup>

Due to the terrorist designation, U.S. diplomats and other government officials are prohibited from negotiating with or even speaking to members. In response to Hamas' electoral victory, the international community placed sanctions on it and froze its assets abroad, making it difficult to govern effectively and make the promised humanitarian and infrastructure investments it had promised. There have since been periodic shelling exchanges between Hamas *from* Gaza and Israel *into* Gaza with subsequent ceasefires, but no lasting peace made.

Internal challenges within Israel proper include months of protests against Israel's current right-wing ruling coalition's disinterest in resolving the Israeli occupation of Palestinian areas and its support for increasing settlement of Palestinian areas discussed in my March 2023 [essay](#). Since the attack on October 6, the protests have ceased, and Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin "Bibi" Netanyahu negotiated a unity government with his top rival.

All Israeli citizens over 18, whether they live in Israel or not, are required to undertake military training (24 months for women and 32 for men) and are considered part of a reserve force eligible to be called to service until the age of 40, or older in times of emergency. In such times, they fight with regular Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) troops. This is why the Israeli government reports it has an invasion force of 360,000 when the usual size of the IDF is around 170,000.<sup>[iii]</sup> Israelis abroad, including from the United States, are scrambling to return to support an anticipated invasion.

Now for the external geopolitical effects.

The October 6 attack has put on hold a proposed peace plan between Israel and Saudi Arabia announced by Netanyahu on September 22 at the annual meeting of the U.N. General Assembly. News outlets have broadly speculated that the attack was partly intended to derail the deal entirely. Just three weeks ago, Netanyahu declared, "Such a peace will go a long way in ending Arab-Israeli conflict and will encourage other Arab States to normalize their relations with Israel," adding that it will also, "enhance prospects of peace with the Palestinians."<sup>[iv]</sup>

Saudi leaders have long expressed that Israel has no right to exist until it withdraws from Palestinian land under what is often called a "two-state solution," with both sides having full rights of citizenship and freedom to choose their own governments. With the U.S. acting as the key negotiator, Saudi Arabia was close to recognizing Israel without this caveat. Saudi Arabia seeks continued

U.S. involvement in the region to counter Iranian influence. Both countries have huge oil reserves that enable them to exert significant influence, and both vie for hegemony in the region.

Saudi Arabia and Iran are sworn enemies, due to Saudis mainly adhering to a strict form of Sunni Islam called Wahabism, for its late proponent Islamic scholar Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Iran's theocratic regime is based on Shi'a Islam, which requires the intercession of learned imams or Islamic scholars between Allah and congregants. There are also historic disputes that would require a much longer essay to describe. The rift in this faith is not unlike the centuries of violent warfare that tore Europe apart after the Reformation divided the continent into Catholic and Protestant countries from the late 1500s until the end of the 19th century, except in Northern Ireland.

Despite his own declaration of support, Netanyahu's previous right-wing coalition of Israeli nationalists were one stumbling block to this historic peace, as were lack of agreement on the extent of Palestinian benefits, and Saudi Arabia's demands that the U.S. agree to unconditional support for building Saudi defense capabilities to enable it to counter a direct attack from Iran.

Thus far, rather than calling for all-out war, Iran has mainly supported proxy organizations in the region, including Shiite Hezbollah, another militant group on the U.S. State Department terrorist list, which operates in Lebanon and has attacked Israel in the past. There is also clear evidence that Iran supports Hamas. While Hamas is essentially Sunni, Iran supports them because, despite their opposing positions *vis á vis* Islam, they essentially hate Israel more. Thus, the enduring Middle Eastern maxim follows, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

There have been recent media speculations that Iran gave consent to the Hamas mission and possibly assisted in planning and execution, but President Joe Biden said in an interview on CBS' "60 Minutes" Sunday said there was no evidence for those claims. Similarly, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken noted in an October 12 interview that this is still speculation, as there are other reports that Iran was as surprised as Israel was.<sup>[v]</sup> Blinken also acknowledged credible information that Iran has provided significant support to Hamas for many years.

Yet another possible casualty of this impending war is Ukraine. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the U.S. has provided \$75 billion in support for Ukraine's defense in military and humanitarian aid. Members of the U.S. Congress, particularly those in the Freedom Caucus, have become increasingly vocal that these funds should be spent at home in the future. The

recent deal to avoid a government shutdown left the next tranche of \$6 billion in Ukraine aid out of the still to be approved 2023-24 budget.

In addition, the failure of Republican House members to elect a new Speaker of the House after they ousted Kevin McCarthy could not have happened at a worse time, as Congress has the sole right in the U.S. Constitution to declare war and to approve and allocate the funds to prosecute it. As of this writing, without a speaker, the House cannot take official action. Meanwhile, Biden has ordered America's largest aircraft carrier, along with its accompanying battle complement of ships to the Persian Gulf for several reasons, including to ensure no interruption of the global oil supply. Depending upon whether or when Israel conducts a full-scale invasion of Gaza and depending upon who else in the neighborhood might get involved, the U.S. could be asked for direct support. Biden pointedly warned Hezbollah and Iran to stay out of the conflict in his "60 Minutes" interview, It must also be remembered that the agreement to avoid shutting down the government expires on November 17, so the budget that should have been approved on October 1 each year is still up in the air.

In addition, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff CQ Brown, Jr. and the chiefs of the Army and Marine service branches were only confirmed by Congress on September 21 and started their jobs on October 1. This is barely enough time to find their way around the Pentagon. The service chiefs serve as key military advisers to the President, along with the defense secretary and the National Security adviser and staff.

To even get them confirmed, full Senate votes were forced, whereas senior military promotions are normally approved in bulk with little discussion by the Senate Armed Services Committee. U.S. Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Alabama, a committee member, continues to block over 300 additional confirmations in opposition to Pentagon policy that allows members of the military to travel for abortion care if they are stationed in a state where such services are restricted. Without these leaders able to take their posts, military readiness can be severely compromised.

On a normal day, this is a very messy world. In this space over the past few months, we have reviewed ongoing conflicts across Sub-Saharan Africa, the war in Ukraine, poor governance and violence in parts of Latin and South America, and political turmoil at home, resulting in migration and other demographic forces exacerbating humanitarian crises. This latest conflict in the Middle East has the potential to spill out across the region with nations and groups such as Iran and Saudi Arabia becoming involved if they are not already.

The U.S. has a unique position of influence with many of these states, but as a global hegemon, it is not able to put out every fire on its own. With political

rancor at a fever pitch in Congress, we are truly feeling the Confucian curse, “May you live in interesting times.”

[ii] “Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations List,” U.S. Department of State, available [here](#), accessed on October 13, 2023.

[iii] “What is the Israel Defense Forces or IDF? What you need to know about the Israeli Military,” USA Today, October 14, 2023 available [here](#), accessed on October 14, 2023.

[iv] “Israel on the cusp of historic peace with Saudi Arabia, Netanyahu announces at UN,” *UN Affairs*, September 22, 2023 available [here](#), accessed on October 14, 2023.

[v] “Blinken says no ‘direct evidence’ that Iran was involved in the Hamas attack on Israel,” *NBC Nightly News*, October 12, 2023 available [here](#), accessed on October 14, 2023.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diane Chido is an Erie native who spent her early career in Washington, D.C, returning to found DC Analytics, a research and analysis firm. She has taught Intelligence Studies at Mercyhurst University, Political Science at Gannon University, and Cultural Analysis at the US Army War College and has conducted research for numerous US defense agencies. She holds an MS in Applied Intelligence Analysis, an MA in Russian Language, and a BA in International Relations and Soviet Studies.



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