**Gaza -The beginning or the end?**

[Najm us Saqib](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/najm-us-saqib)

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It is a Palestinian enclave of 365 square kilometres. It has been besieged for the past sixteen years. This enclave is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. With one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, its 2.4 million inhabitants needed special permission to cross into Egypt or Israel. This was the Gaza Strip before 7 October. After ten days of heavy bombardment by Israel, its intense density has turned into mild sparsity mainly due to the enlargement of graveyards.  
Far from the madding crowd, various government representatives are expressing ‘grave concern’ over the ‘alarming situation’ arising out of the world’s only ‘open-air prison’. On the margins, the discussion is focused mainly on five points. What are the ways and means to restrict the war only to the specified areas? When should we intervene to put an end to this episode? What if Hezbollah also joins hands with Hamas from Lebanon with its full might? How should we convince the Palestinians to use the tunnel for a massive exodus? How about extending the deadline to leave Gaza? Once Gaza is renamed as the ‘Tent City’, how much funds would be required for the UNHCR? The nearby tables are inviting everyone for a hot cup of coffee. Thousands of miles away, Imam-e-Ka’ba is offering prayers for the brave Palestinians!  
‘We are at war, not an operation, not rounds but at war’ PM Benjamin Netanyahu declared soon after Hamas launched one of the deadliest attacks on Israel on 7 October. Later, his Defence Minister ordered a ‘total siege’ on Gaza while his Army Chief expressed the Israeli Armed Forces’ complete readiness for a long-drawn war against Hamas. This time, it was not Israel but someone else who drew the first blood. Somehow, both the attacker and the attacked looked fully prepared.  
Amid an effort to finally decimate those who have ‘no right to exist’, the world may get ready to count the two-way losses till the time the powerful presses for a ceasefire. Looking at the pattern, one of the two scenarios might force the international community to put an end to the ongoing war. Either Israel completes the circle of its ‘satisfaction’ over this ‘unprovoked terrorist attack’ and in the process, tries to crush the noisy ‘grasshoppers’ permanently or the hapless Palestinians, somehow, gain a clear edge in the war miraculously.  
Those who wanted to see Israel out of ‘isolation’ may forget about the deal being brokered by the US. Being the leading proponent of the Palestinian cause in the Muslim world, KSA could ill afford to make such a huge policy change now particularly in view of a full-fledged war going on in its backyard. A wait-and-see posture may be preferred over the possibility of establishing formal relations with Israel. As the deal still requires approval of the US Congress, Riyadh may get the benefit of the doubt if it desires to call off the deal for an indefinite period. Some reports suggest that KSA has already called off the deal. This might be Hamas’s only victory!  
To safeguard their individual national interests, even the countries having a soft corner for Hamas such as Iran, Lebanon, Jordan, and Qatar would also be cautious to extend all-out military support to the Islamic Resistance Movement, unless the war takes some dramatic turn. Serious concerns expressed by Tehran and Ankara indicate the possibility of a larger battleground. In any case, if it is a long-drawn war, as suggested by Israel, the Ummah may get ready to embrace a new look military hotspot in the Middle East.  
The material and military support offered by the US and England to assist Israel in achieving its ‘strategic objectives’ has clearly suggested the possible fate of the war. China’s reaction to the war might prove crucial. With their ‘no limit’ strategic alliance, China and Russia are likely to work behind the scenes particularly in view of their increased interest in the Middle East.  
The present-day Pakistan is in the process of putting its own house in order. The ongoing uncertain eco-political situation demanded a carefully calibrated response to the just-started war in the Middle East. Perhaps, the ‘sentiments’ also needed to be separated from the ‘ground realities’, particularly in the context of Pakistan’s not-so-cosy relations with the West. On the other hand, staying neutral as in the case of the Ukraine war was clearly not possible. Hence, Islamabad has strongly condemned the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force by Israel while reiterating its principled stand on a two-state solution as the key to enduring peace in the Middle East. To this end, issuing any additional statements by the higher officials may be avoided. The more you speak, the more you make mistakes.  
The festering wound had the potential to become cancerous and then grow more deeply into nearby parts. The fact of the matter is that a whole population is facing imminent annihilation under the watchful eyes of the United Nations. Vested interests and principles won in the end. However, as an old saying goes --- you can kill a man, but you cannot kill an idea. Only time will tell whether Palestine was an idea or a killing field. Meanwhile, Gaza needs steering. Not support. A sense of direction and not resolutions.