

MIDDLE EAST

The Hamas-Israel Conflict and Its Global and Regional Implications - 3

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In this Expert Panel Series, we gathered perspectives from various subject experts on the Hamas-Israel conflict and its global and regional impact on geopolitics. This second paper of the Expert Panel Series features Sara Harmouch's insights in response to our inquiry.

The October 7th attack, supported by Iran and Hezbollah, has thrust the Middle East into a critical phase of intensified conflict. This isn't an isolated event but a deliberate escalation, part of a broader strategy that's deepening regional volatility and has the potential to draw in global powers. An escalation can potentially pull in state and non-state actors in the Middle East, like Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Iran, Yemen, and other powers, extending the conflict to other areas in the region.

The evidence of an expanding conflict is clear. The emergence of The Lions' Den in Nablus and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad leaders meeting in Baghdad are tangible indicators of a broadening network of influence and capability. Hezbollah stockpiles chemical weapons, while Iran increases arms transfer to regional allies in Syria and Iraq, signaling preparation for larger confrontations. The October 7th attack, executed with notable sophistication, showcases a Hamas empowered and capable of operations across multiple fronts. Iran's post-attack statement introduces a heightened phase, highlighting the complexity of the emerging multi-dimensional threat landscape.

Hamas’s employment of drones, facilitated by alliances with Iran and Hezbollah, has deepened the complexity of regional conflict and broadened the implications for international security. This technological evolution means not just an enhanced threat level but also a diversification in the modes of conflict, where the lines between state and non-state actors, conventional and unconventional warfare, become increasingly blurred. The international community could see a ripple effect, with similar adaptations of technology by other non-state entities, altering the traditional paradigms of security and defense.

The escalating conflict prompts strategic shifts among global powers. The U.S. might bolster its military and diplomatic efforts in the Middle East to counter Iran’s influence and secure its regional interests. In contrast, allied with Iran and Hezbollah, Russia could leverage the situation to amplify its influence, with the further involvement of the Wagner Group in the Middle East deepening international complexities. Meanwhile, attentive and opportunistic China might assert itself more aggressively in areas like Taiwan, capitalizing on the U.S.’s focus on the Middle East. Not to be overlooked, Turkey’s support for the Palestinian cause and distinct regional aspirations complicate the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) unity. Recent tensions with the U.S. amplified this issue, with potential Turkish engagement in the Middle East risking further strain on intra-NATO cohesion amidst regional unrest. The intricacies of these power plays cannot be overstated, and miscalculations could lead to unforeseen escalations.

A destabilized Middle East threatens global security. America’s strategic interests, allies, and energy resources are at stake. Economic disruptions are inevitable, given the Middle East’s pivotal role in global oil supply. Terrorism, already a persistent threat, is bolstered by the ongoing conflicts, raising global security concerns. Groups like al-Qaeda, exploiting the Palestinian cause to bolster their ranks, could see a surge in membership amidst the ongoing turmoil. Also, there are scenarios where groups with differing ideologies and objectives, like Hezbollah and al-Qaeda might find common ground in

such an escalating conflict. In a further complication, the Houthis in Yemen have voiced intentions of joining forces with Hamas, showcasing their updated arsenal. This assertion adds another layer of complexity and uncertainty, underscoring the multifaceted nature of regional conflicts and their potential to draw diverse militant groups into a broader confrontation. The actions and reactions in the region are not isolated; they are interconnected elements shaping a complex landscape.

The October 7th attack is not an endpoint but the beginning of a calculated offensive with potent potential to destabilize the Middle East. The enhanced capabilities of non-state actors underlined by the growing influence of regional powers like Iran and the strategic maneuvering of global powers underscores the complexity of the emerging scenario. Each move, each alliance, and each confrontation will not only shape the future of the Middle East but will also have lasting impacts on the global geopolitical landscape.

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