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Key takeaways of the Israel-Hamas conflict

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Why is in news? Israel-Hamas conflict: 10 takeaways from a stay in the war zone

Every time the air raid sirens go off in Tel Aviv, the streets become empty — barring perhaps, the lone bemused cat. The nearest shelter could be a strong room next to a stairwell in a highrise, a bathroom in a public building, or an underground parking lot by the white sand beach.

From the cobblestone lanes of Jerusalem to the shining towers of Tel Aviv, a new generation of Israelis is experiencing siege and war for the first time. The October 7 assault by Hamas **came exactly 50 years after the beginning of the Yom Kippur war.**

10 takeaways from covering a war that threatens to change the Middle East:

1. Extent of Hamas brutality

Besides the fact that the attacks took place on Shabbat, the holy day of rest and recuperation, what has shaken Israelis is their raw brutality.

Videos show the **massacre of women, children, and the elderly, with even octogenarians** not spared.

Many in the Israeli establishment **believe Hamas was joined by former ISIS fighters** in Syria and the Levant, killers hired by Iran.

2. Hostage crisis like no other

More than 220 hostages are in Hamas captivity — a number that **is bigger than any that Israeli society and security agencies** have ever dealt with.

Earlier crises have involved hostage numbers in the single digits.

Said an analyst in Tel Aviv, “After a point, these numbers lose relevance, and the establishment doesn’t have the capacity to deal with such a large hostage crisis.”

3. Enormity of the tragedy

At least 7,000 people have been killed since October 7, which includes Israeli and Palestinian civilians.

Israeli airstrikes have pulverised Gaza City, and forced people to flee to the south.

Rocket attacks by Hamas in the south and Hezbollah in the north has led to the evacuation of towns and villages, and internally displaced an estimated 1.2 lakh people within Israel.

In Gaza, **United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)** the sole UN agency still on the ground, says at least 6 lakh people are in their shelters, and another 6 lakh are out in the streets.

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Gaza is without power and essential supplies, and running precariously low on drinking water, fuel, and medicines.

4. Feeling of total betrayal

Israelis who have always been **assured of the surveillance capabilities and preparedness** of their government and security agencies, **feel a crushing sense of betrayal**.

5. Thirsting for revenge

The country of **just about 9 million people — less than a third of the population of Delhi** — is hurting badly at the loss of 1,400 lives.

Most people know at least one victim family with not more than two degrees of separation — and revenge and retribution is top of mind.

6. The sense of community

In the hotel lobbies in Jerusalem, singers and performers are playing violins and doing small concerts for displaced families, psychologists are stopping to just chat and calm anxieties and fears, and hospitals are providing free health checks and extending medical care to those who need it.

7. Beleaguered Netanyahu

The future of Benjamin Netanyahu, the country's six-time Prime Minister appears bleak.

Opposition parties have rallied around the government and a war cabinet has been formed, but the question of political accountability remains open.

Many view Netanyahu, **whose judicial reforms have divided and polarised Israeli society**, as a part of the problem.

For many months, Israel has been roiled by massive weekend demonstrations against the government's attempts to weaken the judiciary, military and government officials have been protesting openly, and analysts feel the Prime Minister took his mind and eyes off the dangers the country faces.

8. Possible role for Jordan

Even assuming Israel succeeds in destroying Hamas entirely, no one knows what happens afterward.

Israel almost certainly cannot occupy Gaza indefinitely, and **one solution could be to persuade an Arab coalition** to take charge of whatever might remain of the enclave.

Should that **scenario arise, a key responsibility may fall on Jordan**.

It is seen as **one of the few players who retain some credibility with the Palestinians**, it is the custodian of the Holy Al Aqsa mosque, and it has long been a benefactor of the Palestinians when others in the Arab world have quietly moved on and started doing business with Israel.

Many world leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have spoken to Jordan's King Abdullah, and Queen Rania has been articulating the plight of the Palestinians on global media.

9. Derailed/delayed peace

West Asia has been witnessing tectonic shifts since the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020-21.

The **normalisation process** between Saudi Arabia and Israel — paused by the Hamas attack — has the potential of transforming the political and economic dynamics of the region.

The **peace dividends of normalcy** held much promise, and initiatives like the I2U2 and the India-Middle-Europe Economic Corridor could suffer in the short to medium term.

The peace process can be resuscitated at a future date by the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which has the capacity to engage with both Israel and Iran.

But the fissures within the Arab world will play their part — the UAE and Bahrain have criticised Hamas, while Saudi Arabia has been cautious so far.

10. View from New Delhi

India has a **tough spot to negotiate from**, with friends and partners on all sides.

Israel is a key strategic defence and security partner, and India's relationships with Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Iran are very important as well.

While **India initially expressed solidarity with Israel** on the terror attacks, it **subsequently sought to balance its position through statements that reiterated its position on the Israel-Palestine issue**, a phone call with the Palestinian leadership, and gifts of humanitarian aid for the people of Gaza.

New Delhi's diplomatic tightrope walk will be **crucial to the 9 million-strong Indian diaspora in the region**, as well as to its continued energy security, since more than 50% of its crude comes from the Middle East.