



## Gaza war threatens world peace

**T**he ongoing war in the Middle East reminds the world that despite the seeming calm in many parts, the much-sought global peace remains elusive. In the early hours of October 7, militants of the Palestinian Hamas group launched coordinated surprise attacks of unprecedented scale on southern Israel from the Gaza Strip. The incursion by land, sea, and air and an associated barrage of missiles resulted in hundreds of deaths, prompting Israeli retaliatory airstrikes on Gaza that killed hundreds more, setting off a potential escalatory spiral that may draw in many more belligerents. The Israel-Hamas confrontation is just the latest episode in a complex and long-standing conflict that defies simple solutions. Historical, political, religious, and territorial factors conflate, leading to decades of tension, violence, and suffering. Achieving lasting peace requires addressing the root causes of the conflict and ensuring the rights and security of all parties involved. There are two paths; one, guaranteed to provoke wars, favoured by Iran, and its proxies – Hamas, Hezbollah, and other extremist factions and terror groups—insists on wiping Israel off the map.

Another, promoted by the United Nations, the United States and its allies, and supported by pragmatic Arab nations like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait prefer a lasting consensus-based peace anchored on an independent state for the Palestinian people side-by-side recognising the right of Israel to exist within its pre-1967 borders. Twenty-one years ago, Saudi Arabia put considerable diplomatic effort into the Arab Peace Initiative, a proposal that unified Arab states in finally offering Israel recognition, regional legitimacy and security in exchange for some concessions. This blueprint is supported by the US President Joe Biden administration. But hardliners on both sides have been frustrating peace moves. Encouraged by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, far-right Jews in Israel; and on the other side, fanatical Arabs, Syria, Islamist fanatics and terrorists, all backed, funded, armed and trained by Iran, a non-Arab state, that seeks Israel's annihilation, persistently create tension.

Experts believe that Iran and Hamas sprung the long-planned assault to derail ongoing peace talks between Israel and Saudi Arabia. A successful settlement of the Palestinian issue threatens Iran's strategy of fomenting perpetual violence in the Middle East through a network of militant proxies from Yemen to Iraq, Lebanon and Gaza.

The world should rally to stop the war. Already, the US, whose citizens have also been killed and held hostage, has pledged full support for Israel and dispatched a naval Carrier Strike Group to the region. Russia, China, and North Korea are only too glad to muddy the waters; Russia, to divert attention and Western assets away from helping the beleaguered Ukraine which it invaded 20 months ago; China, to similarly shift US help away from Taiwan; and North Korea, to sell weapons to Israel's enemies to help its own sinking economy, and annoy the US. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other Arab states should mobilise other countries to broker a ceasefire and resume peace talks. The majority of people on both sides want peace; together, they should defeat the purveyors of violence. There should be an immediate ceasefire and supply of humanitarian aid. Those who perpetrated war crimes should be brought to justice. Hamas must be made to release the hostages.

Palestinian factions should unite for peace. There should be efforts to demilitarise Gaza and lift the Israeli blockade. The international community should step up efforts to realise the two-state solution. Palestinians must have a state of their own; Israel needs security guarantees. Israelis should repudiate the hardliners and religious fanatics in their midst who have been violating existing treaties, UN resolutions, and occupying Arab land. The world is battling several such conflagrations, including the Russian aggression on Ukraine, this war should not escalate. Culled from the Punch Newspapers