

## CSAG INFORMATION PAPER:

# The Israel-Hamas Conflict and its Impact on Central Asia Countries

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*The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of a number of international officers within the Combined Strategic Analysis Group (CSAG) and do not necessarily reflect the views of United States Central Command, nor of the nations represented within the CSAG or any other governmental agency.*

1. **Subject:** The Israel-Hamas conflict and its impact on Central Asia countries.
2. **Purpose:** This paper presents the CSAG’s analysis regarding the perceptions, consequences, and effects of the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza on the Central Asian countries (CA).
3. **Introduction:** Israel’s counterattack on the Gaza Strip, in retaliation for the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, has caused 34,000 deaths among Palestinian civilians<sup>1</sup>, a figure which continues to rise. Many countries have seen popular rejection of Israel’s assault, and the Central Asian (CA) states are no exception.
4. **Facts:**
  - a. Protests in support of Palestinians were organized in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. The protests were peaceful and not well attended, numbering only in the dozens and the authorities want to keep it that way.<sup>2</sup>
  - b. In Uzbekistan, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Uzbek Service found that the Telegram and Instagram apps were used to provide information on boycotting Israeli products.<sup>3</sup>
  - c. At the United Nations, the CA countries, albeit cautiously, joined the majority that did not support Israel. Turkmenistan was an exception, maintaining an official status of “positive neutrality.”<sup>4</sup>
  - d. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan voted in favor of the UN resolution calling for a humanitarian ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, which was adopted on October 27, 2023. Turkmenistan did not participate in the vote.

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<sup>1</sup> Gaza ministry says 34,535 Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes since Oct. 7 | Reuters <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/gaza-ministry-says-34535-palestinians-killed-israeli-strikes-since-oct-7-2024-04-30/> (accessed April 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rickleton Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty <https://www.rferl.org/a/central-asia-public-passions-palestinian-hamas-israel-conflict/32670878.html> Central Asian Countries Try To Manage Public Passions Around Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (rferl.org) (accessed March 2024).

<sup>3</sup> James Durso, “How is Central Asia Responding to the Israel-Hamas War?” *The Hill*, January 02, 2024, (<https://thehill.com/opinion/international/4380690-how-is-central-asia-responding-to-the-israel-hamas-war>) (accessed January 27, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Asia Plus “Central-asia-fears-israel-gaza-war-could-fuel-radicalization” November 02,2023 <https://old.asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/society/20231102/central-asia-fears-israel-gaza-war-could-fuel-radicalization> (accessed March 04, 2024).

- e. On December 12, 2023, CA countries (except Turkmenistan yet again) supported a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip for humanitarian purposes. Israel's representative at the UN deemed this resolution hypocritical as it did not mention the Hamas attack on Israel. Western countries, led by the US, did not vote in favor of either resolution, considering them unbalanced.<sup>5</sup>

**So what: CA analysts have raised fears that the war between Israel and Hamas might have a ripple effect across the region, fueling a new wave of radicalization exacerbated by the effect of strident Russian propaganda.**

#### 5. **Assessment:**

- a. The Middle East is a key energy supplier and crucial shipping passageway. In the scenario of a spill-over with soaring oil prices and global recession, price fluctuations would have a dire effect on CA states already struggling with the economic impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.<sup>6</sup>
- b. Russia could benefit from the current Israel-Hamas conflict, since it diverts/distracts the world's attention from the war in Ukraine and may even result in US diverting arms supplies originally intended for Ukraine to Israel.
- c. CA states are sensitive to signs of radicalization because their citizens were among the foreign ISIS fighters in Iraq and Syria. Stopping the problem at the source will ensure no hiccups in relations with the US, the EU, and Israel, which have embassies in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan.
- d. Local Violent Extremists Organization (VEOs) associated with al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham took advantage of the Israeli attack on Gaza and took to social media to extol the Hamas fighters, calling for Muslims to engage in missionary activity, donate money to them (cryptocurrency preferred), and participate in jihad. Islamists were active on Telegram channels, the reach of which are popular in CA countries, to spread audio and video messages, despite the ease by which local governments can monitor them.
- e. The conflict also challenges initiatives like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), which seeks to connect railroads and ports from India to Europe via the Middle East. This corridor, viewed as a rival to China's Belt and Road Initiative project, could offer an alternative geo-economic balance, particularly if it includes a reliable link between Saudi Arabia and Israel.<sup>7</sup>
- f. CA governments may face pressure from their populations or external actors to take a stance on the conflict, potentially affecting domestic politics and international relations.

**So, what: As conflict continues between Israel and Hamas, the delicate balance of power in the Middle East is further strained. This struggle not only affects immediate neighboring countries but also has implications for CA countries, which have to deal with the potential fallout of instability and insecurity.**

<sup>5</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1144717> (accessed May 2024).

<sup>6</sup> Asia Plus "Central-asia-fears-israel-gaza-war-could-fuel-radicalization" November 02,2023 <https://old.asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/society/20231102/central-asia-fears-israel-gaza-war-could-fuel-radicalization> (accessed March 04, 2024).

<sup>7</sup> Abdul Moiz Khan "The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC): Too Little, Too Late? " <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/91214> (accessed May 24).

**6. Conclusion:**

- a. The 7 months old Israel-Hamas conflict persists, fueled by an increasing reliance on force as a means of problem-solving. In the absence of a universally recognized crisis mediator—despite recent efforts by the US—and a new security paradigm in Israel whose citizens are no longer acceptant of threats on their immediate borders, tensions escalate, leading to a proliferation of conflicts.
- b. Economic concerns center on the Middle East's role as a crucial energy supplier and shipping route. An escalation leading to high oil prices and a global economic decline/recession could seriously affect CA states, which are already dealing with the economic fallout of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- c. The IMEC is still in its early stages but is already being challenged by the conflict, which is complicating its route through Israel and Arab states, and the regional spillover from the conflict that is threatening maritime navigation.
- d. The ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict has placed CA governments in a delicate position, as they face pressure from both domestic populations and external actors to take a standpoint, potentially impacting internal politics and international relations.

**7. Recommendations for US/CENTCOM:**

- a. By investing in partners, USCENTCOM should consider/strengthen support security and military cooperation with CA countries to prevent spillover effects from the conflict.
- b. Each CA state has unique dynamics, so a tailored approach is essential. By engaging in dialogue, promoting stability, and addressing humanitarian needs, USCENTCOM can contribute to regional peace and security and not leave the door open to China/Russia.
- c. Through broader use of social media, the US should improve IE campaigns warning about the danger of disinformation in the region.