

Netanyahu Is an Albatross Around India's Neck

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*One week has passed since an explosive situation erupted in West Asia around Israel. India's famously loquacious **External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar** is maintaining deafening silence. That is not befitting the Vishwaguru (world teacher).*

So far, apart from an emotive tweet from **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** and a subsequent [readout](#) of his phone conversation with Israeli **Prime Minister Netanyahu**, where sentiments of solidarity with Israel were reiterated in a calmer tone, there has been no "stand-alone" MEA statement.

[The brief interjection](#) literally wrung out of the reluctant official spokesman on Thursday by journalists, failed to even refer to the blatant indulgence in war crimes by Israel in real time. Can it be that MEA is under a gag order?

Certainly, it cannot be that the first-rate Arabist-diplomats in the foreign service are keeping their minister in the dark about the explosive situation unfolding in West Asia. Morally, politically and diplomatically, the MEA's deafening silence is appalling. It blasts to smithereens India's claims to be a regional power. And It has no plausible explanation.



Entire neighborhoods have been leveled in the Israeli bombing campaigns. (Photo: Mahmoud Ajjour, Palestine Chronicle)

Not only is India's silence on the massacre in Gaza morally repugnant, it is going to be untenable in strategic terms, as what appeared to the Indian leadership as "terrorist acts in Israel" are dramatically morphing into a savage war in a region where millions of Indians live, earn their livelihood and contribute to India's economy. Consider the following:

- In unprecedented moves, the US has deployed two aircraft carriers with an armada of accompanying warships and fighter aircraft off the shores of Israel. US Central Command and intelligence infrastructure in the region are helping Israel with planning and logistics for Gaza operations. US is pouring advanced weapons in vast quantities to Israeli hands. [Special forces](#) like SEAL teams / Delta Force in nearby European countries are being placed on high alert.
- The UK, the evergreen consort of the Americans in any "coalition of the willing" in war theatres, has announced the despatch of two Royal Navy ships and surveillance aircraft to the eastern Mediterranean in plans to "bolster security." Royal Marines are also being dispatched. Britain's aircraft began patrols off Gaza to "track threats to regional stability such as the transfer of weapons to terrorist groups". The UK Defence Secretary Grant Shapps has stated that the deployment is about "detering others from getting involved in the region" and "maligning external influence".
- Israel has drafted 400,000 reservists as it is "going on the offensive," imposed a total blockade of Gaza and cut off its electricity, water and daily supplies.

Suffice to say, Israel is actively preparing militarily for a regional war with the backing of the US and the UK. An alibi for a regional war can always be generated by creating new facts on the ground. An Israeli attack on Lebanon is possibly in the cards.

The [remarks](#) by the visiting Iranian foreign minister **Amir-Abdollahian** yesterday while on a visit to Beirut (where he met with the Hezbollah leader **Sayed Hassan Nasrallah**) signals every likelihood of the resistance groups reacting to Israeli aggression and war crimes:

- “Some European officials asked me (Amir-Abdollahian) if there were any chances that new fronts might open up against the Zionist regime. I told them if the Zionists keep up their war crimes, there exists every prospect that other resistance movements [may enter the war]... Continuation of these war crimes will be followed by other reactions on other axes...
- “Palestinian resistance is powerful and has high capabilities, and if Israel’s crimes continue, the Palestinian resistance will use its other capacities...
- “(Americans) calling others in the region to exercise self-restraint on the one hand and providing full support for the usurping Israeli regime to continue its war crimes on the other is a contradictory behaviour which violates the claim that they do not want to expand the scope of war and conflict.”
- “We believe that war crimes against the people of Palestine must be stopped immediately, and the humanitarian siege, cutting off water, electricity, and medicine for the people of Gaza, must be lifted... Iran will strongly continue its support for the resistance. Resistance is the absolute right of Palestinians in the face of Israeli occupation...

Following a closed-door UN Security Council meeting on the current escalation, Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations **Vasily Nebenzya** warned, “The region is on the brink of a full scale war and an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe.”

To be sure, the geopolitical dimensions of the incoming war too are surfacing. Nebenzya added,

“Let me be clear: the responsibility for the looming war in the Middle East, to a large extent, lies on the United States. It is Washington that recklessly and selfishly blocked the work of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators in an effort to monopolise the peace process and limit it to imposing an economic peace with Israel on the Palestinians and other Arab countries without solving the Palestinian question.”

Russia presented a [draft resolution](#) at the Security Council which called for an immediate and long-term ceasefire that all parties would respect; an immediate release of hostages; and “the unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance, including of food, fuel and medical treatment, as well as creating conditions for the safe evacuation of civilians in need.”

But the Russian initiative won’t fly. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced in a televised address,

“We are responding to our enemies with great force, with unprecedented force. I would like to point out that it’s just the beginning. Our enemies have just begun to pay. I will not go into detail of what will come next, but I will say that it is just the beginning.”

Conceivably, that leaves [Moscow to explore other options](#). A BRICS initiative is one possibility. [Brazil and China are in consultation](#). And, so, indeed [China and Saudi Arabia](#). President Putin is likely meeting Xi Jinping in Beijing.

The really intriguing part is that plentiful intelligence assessments were available with Israel about the strong possibility of an operation by Hamas last Saturday. Egypt has confirmed that it passed on intelligence to Israel.

CNN has since reported that US intelligence agencies too warned about a potential escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shortly before the October 7 Hamas attack. The following excerpts from the CNN report are stunning, to say the least:

“One (US) update from September 28 warned, based on multiple streams of intelligence, that... Hamas was poised to escalate rocket-attacks across the border. An October 5 wire from the CIA warned generally of the increasing possibility of violence by Hamas. Then, on October 6, the day before the attack, US officials circulated **reporting from Israel** indicating unusual activity by Hamas — indications that are now clear: an attack was imminent.” (Emphasis added.)

Yet, Netanyahu didn't act! Quite possibly, this 800-pound gorilla in Israeli political jungle calculated that a Holocaust may not be a bad idea if it helped him survive the existential crisis in his political career — the legal charges and the possibility of jail term coupled with a troubled relationship with the Biden Administration.

Curiously, the emergent geopolitical situation is engendering a convergence of interests between Netanyahu and Biden. Biden is also facing an existential challenge from NATO's inevitable defeat in the Ukraine war and there is no better way to contain the fallouts damaging his standing in the 2024 election than to decouple and career away toward a defence of Israel's security, which will rally the powerful Jewish lobby and appeal to the public opinion.

The big question remains: Did Netanyahu take us for a ride by mixing Islamophobia and terrorism into a heady cocktail that is seductive in its appeal in these extraordinary times in Indian politics?

A bromance with Netanyahu was never to have a happy ending. [Trump just revealed](#) how Netanyahu scooted at the eleventh hour from the joint US-Israeli plot to assassinate the charismatic Iranian general **Qassem Soleimani** — and then, rushed in later to take credit for it.

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Featured image: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu holds up a map showing the occupied West Bank and Gaza as part of Israel during his speech at the UN General Assembly, 22 September 2023 (Reuters)

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