

HAMAS'S BIGGEST SURPRISE

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In the aftermath of the recent Hamas attacks against Israel in Gaza, more horrific things are likely to be witnessed in coming days. The unprecedented attacks were first ever infiltration by Hamas in Israeli occupied territory with weapons.

Hamas's multi-pronged attacks code-named 'Toofan Al-Aqsa', was 'utterly embarrassing' for Israel and 'complete failure' of their intelligence setup. Early morning on Saturday, thousands of rocket were fired by Hamas from across the border, followed by armed motorized paratroopers landing in Israeli held territory. Footages of Palestinian fighters bulldozing through the invincible fences stunned everyone.

The biggest ever Hamas attack was well-planned and immaculately executed. Hamas must have been planning for quite some time. Unlike the older Palestinian generation, the young Hamas fighters have now decided to ignore the false promises and rhetoric of mediations by the world.

Israeli response and how much harder will Netanyahu push is not very difficult to predict. Israel has responded with air strikes on Palestinian settlements. Netanyahu is under a lot of pressure and is likely to take severe punitive actions. Israelis are fighting for the first time on their territory. So new rules of game may come up with even stricter embargoes in the biggest prison of the world.

Declaring it a 'war', Netanyahu has said that "Enemy will pay a price that they cannot imagine." Minutes after the Israeli aircraft destroyed two buildings in the heart of Gaza, believed to be the Hamas headquarters, Hamas spokesman responded by saying that "Now Tel Aviv has to stand on one leg" meaning that Hamas is also determined to persevere with more surprises.

Meanwhile, Israeli army has launched Operation "Iron Sword". High alert and top emergency situation has been declared in Israel, something unusual for their citizens.

Declaring victory by Hamas could be too early. The Palestinian death toll is over 1000 with many injured. Israeli media has reported about 250 killed while the health ministry has said that another 1,452 people have been taken

to hospital, with 285 in critical condition. But more agonizing for Tel Aviv is the 50 plus Israeli captives in the hands of Hamas, which will ostensibly be used to barter some high-level Palestinians in Israeli jails. Israelis must be feeling greater pain, after all they are not very used to casualties and giving captives.

Unlike previous fights, this time Hamas has initiated the war. Efforts for some meaningful reconciliations have already started. Turkiye's President Erdogan has asked both sides to "act with restraint." Although the bilateral relations between Turkiye and Israel are strained since May 2010 due to Mavi Marmara incident that took place in the Mediterranean, both countries are recently engaged in a rapprochement.

Egypt and United Nations have also asked both sides to show restraint and have called for immediate cessation of hostilities. United States, as usual, is standing with its real partner, Israel.

Indian response to the Hamas's stunning attacks was swift and not unusual. Modi has termed the Hamas action as "terrorist attacks", trying to vindicate their unjust occupation of Kashmir.

The Saudi official statement was rather cautious considering that they were very close to recognizing Israel like UAE did after August 2020 Abraham Accord. KSA has called for "immediate halt to the escalation of conflict". The Secretary General of GCC, however, held the "Israeli occupation forces responsible for the current situation resulting from the continuous and flagrant Israeli attacks against the Palestinian people and holy sites."

Hezbollah has announced unconditional support for Hamas. The two groups coordinating with each other will be dreadful situation for Israel. If that happens, the situation is likely exacerbate further.

Tensions may escalate with Iran also as Iran is alleged to be funding Hamas besides providing weaponry support. Khamenei pronouncing the Hamas attacks as "a proud operation" and "a brilliant victory" has further put fuel to the fire. Iran does not accept any Israeli proposal of settlement; but calls for a referendum.

Probably, Saudi Arabia could play critical role in normalization as it has recently improved its relations with Israel and can also insulate Iran to some extent in the negotiations. However, any peace talks in immediate timeframe are unlikely, at least till the time Israel has taken **enough** revenge.

Unfortunately, the civilians on both sides are facing the brunt. Thousands are likely to be displaced. Electricity cuts and water shortages are already rampant in Palestinian settlements. Israeli residents will also feel the heat as many have started fleeing the area. It is hoped that the world feels the pain and anguish of thousands of Palestinians who have been killed and unjustly displaced from their homeland.

As of now, Hamas seems to have the edge with Israeli captive in their

hands. Hamas using these captives as human shields cannot be ruled out. Although real aim of Hamas is not yet clear, they would certainly negotiate for return of settlements unlawfully usurped by Israeli occupation forces.

It is naturally impossible for Palestinians, who have suffered a lot at the hands of Israeli occupation forces, to remain silent and abstain from retaliation. This time, Hamas has probably decided to “Reply with stones for Brickbats – Eent ka jawab pathar se”. Even the western analysts consider Israel more responsible for what has recently happened. Considering their resolve and determination, Hamas is not likely to stop and accept Israeli illegitimate occupation until freedom and dignity of Palestinians is restored.

In nutshell, it was a huge intelligence fiasco, highly embarrassing and a nightmare for Israeli leadership. It all came as a repose to what Israel has been doing at Al-Aqsa for the past few years. The ‘Iron Dome’ myth has been shattered.