



## Hamas-Israel Conflict Has Repercussions in the Global South

Jędrzej Czerep, Patryk Kugiel

Hamas' 7 October attack on Israel and the country's subsequent military intervention in the Gaza Strip have led to differing reactions among the countries of the Global South, despite their traditional sympathy for the Palestinians. In the first days of the crisis, the scale of solidarity with Israel was unexpectedly high, but it gave way to pro-Palestinian sentiment in response to the Israeli attacks on Gaza. The escalation of the conflict and the support of the U.S. and European countries for Israel may contribute to a deterioration of their credibility in many developing countries. Accusations of double standards in applying international law may lead to a weakening of global sympathy for Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression.

**Global South Reacts to Israel-Hamas War.** The vast majority of countries in the Global South, especially those in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, perceive the conflict between the Palestinians and Israel in terms of a fight against colonialism and imperialism. However, the attack by Hamas terrorists on 7 October and the crimes they committed caused shock and solidarity with Israel in many countries of the Global South. For example, Kenya's foreign minister condemned unprovoked aggression not only as an act that violates peace in the Middle East but also "threatens world peace and security". Similarly, the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) (DRC) took a very clear pro-Israel position. Previously, the DRC had been accused by Israel of anti-Semitism in connection with attempts to exclude Moïse Katumbi, a politician with Greek-Jewish roots, from the presidential elections. Declarations clearly supporting Israel also came from Rwanda and others, while people carrying Israeli flags appeared spontaneously on the streets of many African cities, including in Monrovia, Liberia. A few hours after the Hamas attack, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, a country that traditionally supports the Palestinians, offered solidarity with Israel and condemnation of the terrorist attacks.

On the other hand, [Arab](#) and Muslim countries (Indonesia, the Maldives, Pakistan, etc.) and a significant number of

Global South countries took a critical stance towards Israel, blaming it for contributing to the outbreak of the conflict. It also was an opportunity to call again for the idea of the creation of two separate states, including an independent Palestine, and to condemn the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. For example, the chairman of the African Union (AU) Commission Moussa Faki, in a 7 October communiqué, pointed to the denial of the right to statehood to the Palestinians as "the main cause of the permanent Israeli-Palestinian tension". The South African Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed a similar position and offered mediation.

Criticism of Israel intensified after bombing in the Gaza Strip and the announcement of a total blockade of it by the Israelis. The leaders of many countries, such as Indonesia and Colombia, strongly condemned the attacks that killed civilians, accusing Israel of exercising collective responsibility and [violating international law](#). After the explosion at the Al Ahli Arab hospital on 17 October, AU Commission' head clearly assigned guilt to Israel as a war crime, although some preliminary findings indicated the possibility of an accidental explosion caused by a rocket fired by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Chairman's statement contrasted with the lack of similar AU condemnation of recent attacks on hospitals deliberately destroyed by parties in conflict in Ethiopia and

Sudan. The pro-Palestinian position of developing countries was confirmed by the 27 October vote in the UN General Assembly on a resolution calling for an “immediate humanitarian truce”, which was supported by 120 countries, most from the Global South.

**Assessment of the West’s Position on the War.** The conflict over Gaza has also become an opportunity for increased criticism of Western policy. The [U.S.](#) and [EU](#)’s clear expression of solidarity with Israel and support for its right to self-defence has been perceived as giving it a “free hand” to destroy Hamas regardless of civilian casualties. Subsequent calls for respect for international law and efforts to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza have failed to change the impression in many southern societies that for these global powers, civilian casualties in Gaza matter less than those killed in Israel or Ukraine. Due to mutual vetoing of draft resolutions in the Security Council by permanent members, the UN Security Council has been paralysed. On 18 October, the United States vetoed a Brazilian resolution condemning Hamas and calling for a “humanitarian pause”, and then on 26 October, Russia and China both vetoed an American resolution, while the Russian proposal did not receive a majority.

The inability to agree on a common text weakens the West’s image as a force protecting international law and an order based on principles. This is a blow for the EU, which promotes itself as a “normative power” defending human rights and international standards. This undermines the efforts in recent months by the West to persuade developing countries to support Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression in violation of the principles of the United Nations Charter. However, the argument of defending an order based on law was not effective as some cited the unlawful nature of the American intervention in Iraq in 2003, among other things.

Reactions to the recent events in the Middle East will increase the belief in the Global South that international law primarily serves Western world powers. Such allegations have regularly appeared, for example, in connection with the activities of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which [in its first years exclusively conducted investigations into countries of the Global South](#). Additionally, the lack of prospects for the ICC to prosecute the Israeli perpetrators of violations committed during *Operation Cast Lead* in Gaza in 2008-2009 resulted in African countries refraining from enforcing an arrest warrant issued in March 2009 for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for crimes in Darfur.

**Gaza and the Global South’s Support for Ukraine.** Over the last year and a half, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has remained an important [point of reference for the countries of the Global South in the context of Ukraine](#). For Russia, declarations of understanding about the Palestinians’ arguments and offers of mediation also serve to strengthen

its position in African and Asian countries and make it more difficult for Ukraine to gain sympathy there, despite the latter opening a number of new embassies there, launching the “Grain from Ukraine” programme to alleviate the effects of the [food crisis](#), and the appointment by President Volodymyr Zelensky of a special envoy for the Middle East and Africa (Maxim Subkh) and visits to Saudi Arabia and other states. This has produced some results, such as the [evolution of South Africa’s attitude](#), which initially clearly replicated the Russian position, but later demanded respect for internationally recognised borders and the return of abducted children.

The effects of these actions largely depend on Ukraine adopting a balanced approach towards Palestine. While Zelensky’s first declarations provided clear and full support for Israel, the transition of the conflict to the stage in which the greatest number of victims are Palestinian civilian victims required a correction of the message. An attempt to influence in this spirit was the statement of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 17 October (even before the tragedy in the Al Ahli Arab hospital) in which the emphasis was placed on stopping actions that increase the number of victims and the need to strive for peace based on the two-state principle. They were clearly aimed at the audience in the Global South, as were Subkh’s statements about the shared experience of Ukrainians and civilian victims in Gaza.

**Perspectives.** It could have been expected that the initial declarations of support for Israel would give way to pro-Palestinian sentiments, particularly visible among the countries of the Global South. If the war drags on and the number of civilian casualties increases as a result of the ground intervention, there will be increasing political pressure on Israel to end its retaliatory action. At the same time, the claims of double standards in Western policy threaten to further erode the credibility of the narrative emphasising respect for international law and degrade the image of the U.S. and the EU in this part of the world. Both [Russia](#) and [China](#) benefit from this situation, gaining an important argument in their criticism of the West. The attractiveness of BRICS as a bloc contesting the Western-dominated order may increase. This may translate directly into a decline in sympathy and support for Ukraine among developing countries.

The EU should strive to demonstrate its image as a defender of international law. This will be more difficult given the divisions within the EU itself, visible during the vote in the UN General Assembly on 27 October when eight members were in favour of the resolution, four against, and 15 abstained. Despite problems with developing a coherent political position, the EU should strive, in consultation with regional partners, to prevent escalation of the conflict to the entire region. It should also ensure the continuity and visibility of humanitarian support for the people of Gaza.