

Israel-Hamas War

—By Wing Commander Dinesh Mathur, VSM (Retd.)

While working in any organisation, an individual's social behaviour and conduct hugely impact his/her overall job performance. It is interesting to observe that an individual's conduct is markedly different when he acts alone compared to when he/she is part of a group. Several personality traits play an important role in moulding a person's group behaviour. It is this group behaviour of a person that is assessed to decide an individual's suitability or otherwise to undergo a course of instruction or perform a high-level job. While an individual participates in a group discussion (GD), his/her group behaviour comes to the fore relatively easily. Therefore, Group Discussion is popularly used by both public and private sector enterprises as a never-failing personality and social behaviour assessment technique.

In view of the above, candidates are advised to get familiar with a few significant smart hints for excelling in group discussions. Before the GD commences, candidates should build a rapport with other candidates while waiting in the waiting room. One should initiate the discussion only if he/she is sure and familiar with the topic. One has to grab the opportunity to speak, but while doing so, one need not be abrasive but tactful. Do keep eye contact with other candidates and adopt receptive body language. One must support arguments with data and relevant information and also remain cool, rational and unbiased. Try to arrive at a consensus as the group discussion concludes. This is quite feasible if the candidate adopts a policy of give and take, and gives due respect to others' opinions.

The above topic was selected by a group of ten candidates, who were called to participate in a group discussion for the selection of managers in a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU). The candidates arrived formally dressed and were briefed comprehensively about the Dos and Don'ts for the conduct of this GD by the three assessors. The assessors informed the candidates that they would not interfere during the entire conduct of this GD, and candidates were at liberty to speak as much as they wanted. Still, all candidates must be given an opportunity to speak. Finally, candidates were asked to maintain discipline and conclude within 25-30 minutes. They



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were given 5 minutes to arrange their thoughts and then start.

The group discussion commenced in the following manner :

Candidate No. 1: Good morning, friends. As you know, we have to discuss this much controversial international topic, the 'Israel-Hamas War'. Even though this emanates from ancient animosity, it has suddenly come to the limelight consequent to Hamas, which is an Islamist militant group ruling the Palestinians-dominated Gaza Strip, carrying out a cross-border land raid on October 7, 2023, killing over 1200 Israelis and taking over 200 Israeli hostages back to Gaza. Thereupon, Israel conducted heavy bombardment of Gaza, killing hundreds of people and resorting to a "complete siege" of the Gaza Strip, which has allegedly led to a severe humanitarian crisis. This issue has become a centre of controversy as world opinion is highly divided on the Hamas strike and consequent severe retaliatory action taken by Israel. We need to discuss the origin of the Israel-Palestine enmity and the circumstances that led to the current situation involving Hamas. Please give your opinion. Thanks.

Candidate No. 3: To understand the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas, it is essential to know the background of the place and the people associated with it. This approach is needed to understand the nuances of this issue. I hope you all agree with me.

Candidate No. 5: Yes, I feel this is the right approach to do justice to this complex topic.

Candidate No. 6: Well, the present war has its roots in the 20th century. As we know, Israel is a small country in West Asia. It has many sites that are of religious importance to Christians, Muslims and Jews—all having a complex history. Presently, the population of Israel is mostly Jewish, though there are minorities of Christians and Muslims. The history of Israel is sourced from the Hebrew Bible. Israel can be traced back to the biblical figure Abraham, who is deemed the father of Judaism (through his son Isaac) and a patriarch of Islam (his second son Ishmael). Egyptians enslaved the descendants of Abraham for hundreds of years. Subsequently, the Israel region was raided by numerous empires.

Candidate No. 8: I recall that Israeli territory was conquered and ruled by Persians, Romans, Arabs, Mamluks and finally Ottomans in the past. From 1517 to 1917, the Ottoman Empire ruled over Israel. In the 19th century, the population in this region of Israel/Palestine was about 87% Muslims, 10% Christians and 3% Jews. They all lived in peace, but in the city of Jerusalem, the population of the three communities was almost equal. In the 19th century, a Jewish journalist, Theodor Herzl, propagated the idea of a Jewish homeland. The idea became famous as Zionism, which was much supported by the Jews in Europe.

Candidate No. 1: I would like to add that in 1917, aiming to get Jewish support for World War I, the British government announced the 'Balfour Declaration', which promised to establish a homeland for Jewish people. This was difficult to implement at that time due to a variety of reasons, and the Arabs strongly opposed this proposal, fearing it would mean suppression of Palestinians. During the subsequent period, a considerable number of Jews moved from Europe to Palestine in the hope of creating a homeland for themselves. After World War 1, as per the mandate of the League of Nations, the British established a colony in Palestine for Jews. This increased the tensions between the Jewish population and Palestinian Arabs manifold.

Candidate No. 10: I think, No. 8 and No. 1 have adequately described the facts leading to this problem.

Candidate No. 6: It must be noted that in 1936, Palestinian Arabs revolted against the British, which the British suppressed with the help of Jews. Again, during World War II, a large number of Jews entered Palestine with the help of Jewish organisations. As the situation became worse, the British handed over this problem to the United Nations, and in 1947, the UN divided Palestine into Palestinian and Jewish states. The Arabs rejected this plan, but in 1948, Israel was declared an Independent state. This immediately led to the Arab-Israel war in 1948, which was joined by Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan against Israel.

Candidate No. 7: It was quite interesting to know how Israel was established with so much controversy. This development created a considerable rift between Israel and Arab nations.

Candidate No. 8: Let me add that after this war, which Israel won, it controlled more area than it would have gotten under the UN plan. About 7 lakh Palestinians became refugees in neighbouring Arab nations, and Palestinians called this war the *Nakba*, meaning a catastrophe, as they became homeless. But, once again, when Egypt nationalised the Suez Canal in 1956, Israel, with British and French support, attacked and retook the canal.

Candidate No. 3: It is evident that tensions continued between Arab nations and Israel from very early times.

Candidate No. 1: Yes, in 1964, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was formed to fight for the cause of Palestinians. Unfortunately, a war broke out in 1967, which Israel won again and got control of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, the Sinai Peninsula and East Jerusalem. Later, in 1973, Syria and Egypt attacked Israel, and the war ended after a UN resolution. In 1982, Israel attacked Lebanon and ejected the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). It is noteworthy that during this period, Jewish settlements continued to increase in areas that were considered Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Candidate No. 2: As we can see, things were getting complicated after Israel occupied these territories.

Candidate No. 6: Yes, Palestinians reacted against the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, leading to a major conflict in 1987 in which hundreds of people lost their lives. As a result, Hamas, a violent group, was formed. The conflict ended after the Oslo Peace Accords 1993 and another accord in 1995 between the Israeli Prime Minister and

the leader of PLO. After this, the Palestinian Authority was constituted, and it took control over some areas in Israel. Later, in 1997, the Israeli army vacated parts of the West Bank, but despite the accords, tension continued, and peace could not be restored in the area.

Candidate No. 5: Let me add, in 2000, Palestinians again revolted consequent to a visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem by an important Israeli politician, Ariel Sharon. This led to much violence and disturbance, which continued for a long time. After a while, a ceasefire was declared, and Israel planned to withdraw all troops and Jewish settlements from the Gaza Strip by 2005.

Candidate No. 7: I think you have missed the Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon in 1982 to demolish the PLO, which was operating from there. It was also called the 'First Lebanon War'.

Candidate No. 9: It's really sad to know that there have been so many conflicts between Arab nations and Israel, yet this issue has still not been resolved.

Candidate No. 8: Yes, you are quite right because, again, in 2006, there was a major war between Israel and Hezbollah, which is a Lebanon Islamic political party and a militant organisation. This war, which is also known as the Second Lebanon War, ended consequent to a UN-sponsored ceasefire. In 2006, another significant development took place when Hamas, an Islamic group, which presently many think is a terrorist group, won the elections in Palestine. Hamas, after a conflict, defeated Fatah, which controlled the PLO. Hamas fought several wars against Israel, notably in 2008, 2012 and 2014. Hamas currently rules over the Gaza Strip or Gaza, which is the smaller of the two Palestinian territories situated on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Candidate No. 1: Currently, quite a few Palestinian refugees stay in Gaza, the West Bank, East Jordan, Syria and, of course, Lebanon. We know that the West Bank is sandwiched between Israel and Jordan and is the largest of two Palestinian territories which was captured and occupied by Israel. Part of this area was to be transferred to Palestine, as advised by the International Court of Justice, but this did not happen. Needless to say, there is a discernible unease and state of conflict between people staying in these areas and Israel. Gaza Strip is located between Israel and Egypt.

Candidate No. 3: I feel the issue is not being resolved because, as per Israel, permitting Palestinians to go back to their homes will threaten the existence of Israel, which is the only Jewish state in the world presently. Israel claims the entire Jerusalem as the capital of Israel,

while Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian state. Moreover, though more than 135 countries of the UN recognise Palestine as a state, Israel does not.

Candidate No. 6: Friends, it is important to note that in 1988, India was one of the first nations to recognise the Palestine State and has been supporting the Palestine cause all these years. Recently, about two years back, Palestinians protested over the issue of the eviction of some Palestinian families from occupied East Jerusalem on the orders of the Supreme Court of Israel. Subsequently, the Israeli police entered the Al Aqsa mosque and later, Hamas and Palestinian groups started firing rockets from Gaza into Israel, to which Israel also retaliated.

Candidate No. 5: I think it would be appropriate to talk about the significance of the city of Jerusalem, which is a holy place for three religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Both Israel and Palestine lay their claim on this city. While Israel considers the whole of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, Palestinians refute this. In 1948, this city was bifurcated into western and eastern parts when Israel announced its independence. Western Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, and Eastern Jerusalem became part of Jordan.

Candidate No. 4: It's obvious Jerusalem has its own significance in this entire Palestine-Israel enmity.

Candidate No. 8: In fact, East Jerusalem was captured by Israel along with some other areas after the 1967 war. Later, the UN passed a resolution and asked Israel to vacate the occupied areas. In 1980, through a resolution in the Israeli Parliament, complete Jerusalem was declared the capital of Israel. Many nations consider this declaration illegal. To support Israel, the then US President, Mr. Donald Trump, recognised the whole of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017.

Candidate No. 7: Friends, I think we have discussed the historical aspects of this issue fairly well. Let us now talk about how the latest war was triggered on October 7, 2023, wherein Hamas launched a massive surprise assault on Israel. Am I right?

Candidate No. 1: Yes, you are right. It is said that the trigger for this Hamas assault was the culmination of long-building anger over Israeli policy, including the recent outbreak of violence at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the ill-treatment of Palestinians and the expansion of Israeli settlements. Hamas attacked with hundreds of militants, using motorcycles, pickup trucks and rockets, and entered Israeli cities, killing

over 1200 people and taking over 200 hostages who were soldiers and civilians. This attack took Israel by surprise, raising questions on its much-hyped intelligence. Through this attack, Hamas tried to bring the Palestinian cause into focus once again.

Candidate No. 6: The Hamas attack was called a terrorist attack and was bitterly condemned by most nations, including India. This attack dealt a body blow to Israel's image of invincibility. But, shortly after the Hamas attack, Israel declared war on Hamas and its troops gathered along the border of the 360 sq. km Gaza Strip, and 2.3 million residents of Gaza were asked to evacuate the northern region. Soon, Gaza was heavily bombarded by Israel, killing a huge number of people, which included children. The complete siege of the territory led to an alleged severe humanitarian crisis, with electricity cut off, hospitals becoming non-functional, a large number of people displaced and food supplies running out.

Candidate No. 3: Israel also declared that to win this war, they would have to destroy Hamas. Israel defended their firing on hospitals by pointing out that terrorists were hiding in tunnels constructed under hospital buildings in Gaza. Large portions of Gaza are already under the control of Israel now.

Candidate No. 8: I would like to mention the geopolitical angle of this issue. As with earlier confrontations with the Palestinians, Israel has full support not just from the US administration, the UK and others, but also from the US political and media establishment. It needs to be noted that this Hamas attack came when Israel and Saudi Arabia were in an advanced stage of normalisation talks. These talks would reset West Asian geopolitical dynamics and put Hamas at a further disadvantage. Presently, Iran backs Hamas and Islamic jihad, but a fear of Iran's growing assertiveness also drove the Arab nations towards establishing friendly ties with Israel. These policy shifts would mean backing away from their traditional position on Palestine and aligning with the US policy on the Middle East. This goes against the aspirations of Palestinians, and they are getting desperate.

Candidate No. 1: That's quite true, but as Israel's retaliation against Hamas has gone too far, the process of Arab-Israel normalisation is in danger now, and Arab countries are forced to criticise Israel for this extended war and causing a massive humanitarian crisis in Gaza by killing about 14,000 people, which include women, children and even hospital patients, and not allowing humanitarian aid in the territory.

Countries of the Global South now also largely stand with Palestinians. Most of them voted for a 'humanitarian pause' in the fighting in Gaza in a resolution passed by the UN General Assembly recently. Later, mediated by Qatar and with support from the US and Egypt, a pause in the fighting in exchange for hostages and prisoners was achieved, bringing some relief to the civilian population.

Candidate No. 5: Friends, I think we need to talk about India's stand on this issue as well. I hope you all agree with me.

Candidate No. 6: Yes, you are right.

Let me add that India, which was historically at the forefront of supporting the Palestinian cause, did speak against the terrorist attack by Hamas and sympathised with Israel. It even abstained from voting on the UN resolution, which called for a humanitarian truce in Gaza. However, while backing Israel against terror, India has also backed talks for a two-state solution and sought adherence to international humanitarian law. But later, India voted against Israeli settlements in the occupied territory of Palestine.

Candidate No. 8: I would like to discuss India's concern about the outcome of this conflict on a significant project planned by India. Recently, our government stated that the ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict is a worrying manifestation of the geopolitical challenges faced by the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC), which had been launched to counter China's BRI project. This project has been launched jointly by India, the US, UAE, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany, Italy and European Union. It will connect Indian ports on the west coast with those in the UAE and Saudi Arabia with a rail link moving the goods to Haifa in Israel.

Candidate No. 7: I think we have discussed this issue quite elaborately. Can some friends talk about the way forward now?

Candidate No. 1: Looking at past developments, the world at large has to come together to find a peaceful solution to this complex issue. A balanced approach is needed, which may be acceptable to Israel as well as to Palestinians. In this regard, the recent normalisation agreements between Israel and UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco, known as the Abraham Accords, are considered steps in the right direction. As rightly suggested by India, a two-state solution is the only way out. Recently, the US President has said that the endpoint of the Israel-Hamas conflict has to be a Palestinian State that exists alongside an Israeli one. This approach needs to be given due attention.

Candidate No. 10: Friends, the time allotted to us for this GD is getting over, and we must conclude it now. Can I request No. 8 to conclude if you all agree?

Candidate No. 2: Yes, No. 8, please conclude.

Candidate No. 8: Friends, we have discussed this extremely controversial and old issue in a historical context to appreciate the current situation. Consequent to a brutal attack by Hamas on Israel, Israel heavily bombed the Gaza Strip, captured a large portion of the Gaza Strip and killed a large number of people. We also discussed what triggered these unfortunate developments. This conflict has the potential to change the geopolitics of West Asia, and we discussed this aspect in sufficient detail. We also learned that India supports a two-nation solution to this issue as per international law. We also discussed the way forward to find a solution to this vexed issue. Given that so many countries are involved in this issue, it is the need of the hour that multilateral forums act as a mediator to resolve this issue.

Thanks, friends. Have a good day.

Critical Analysis of Candidates' Performance

Good: 1, 6 and 8

These candidates have displayed good knowledge of this very complex issue, which involves so many nations and impacts the entire world. It is quite apparent that they have made adequate efforts to familiarise themselves with the historical aspects of this old issue. Other candidates did not dispute the data and information presented by these candidates. They have brought out the latest developments on Israel-Palestine relations, which convinced other candidates. Thus, they contributed significantly to this group discussion, and their assessment was 'Good'.

Average: 3, 5 and 7

These candidates did utilise opportunities that came their way and managed to speak a few times. It became apparent that they were not so well prepared to participate in this competitive group discussion. Of course, they guided the discussion to cover all aspects of this vast topic, and their views were generally for the furtherance of this group discussion. However, their contribution to the discussion remained just about 'Average'.

Below Average: 2, 4, 9 and 10

These candidates generally remained aloof and withdrawn. It was observed they were merely agreeing with participating candidates or encouraging them. They did not make any noticeable contribution towards this discussion. This was largely due to the fact that they decided to come for this GD without making any preparations. The topic for this GD was quite complex and needed adequate preparation from the participants. For these reasons, these candidates were assessed as 'Below Average'.

CSR