

From Sonipat to Tel Aviv: A Costa Rican Amid Two Conflicts

De Sonipat a Tel Aviv: un costarricense en medio de dos conflictos

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Context

The moment I decided to travel from Costa Rica to India to study and learn about diplomacy and international politics through a different lens, I never imagined that, in the final months of my two-year Master's program, I would find myself in the middle of two major conflicts. This is where letters, books, and traditional education cannot take you—only person-to-person experiences, conversations, shared worries, expectations, and, at times, philosophical dilemmas that lead to agreements or disagreements on different worldviews.

Having been raised in a country without an army, I have observed that the primary conflicts we face revolve around natural disasters, crime, electoral tensions, and, occasionally, border issues, which are sent to arbitration. The layers of conflict are vast—from disagreements at school to tensions within families and so on—but world-scale conflicts, where nations can destroy each other, are far from the background of someone from Costa Rica. Even if you study them through books, documentaries, films, podcasts, or video games, the lived experience is entirely different. Near a war zone, fear and uncertainty prevail, and escalation is possible—and potentially fatal.

Development

Yet person-to-person engagement—the empathy and solidarity that arise in chaotic moments—helps you mirror emotions, offer support, and think constructively to manage the upheaval. There is also disinterest or stark realism—people saying, “It is what it is,” or “We’re used to it; there’s nothing to do; we’ll be okay.” That adds to the complexity of living through a major conflict.

Concretely, after the terrorist attack that triggered Operation Sindoor, I paid closer attention to how national security dynamics permeate daily life. In Sonapat, Haryana, a state of alert became my reality and that of most people around me. You may not think about it all day, but it’s there, and you plan accordingly while it lasts.

The unity forged through drills and mass mobilization, the importance of reliable sources, witnessing national security measures, and the vital role of communication, coordination, and cooperation made me acutely aware of the tension in the air. Behavioral changes and classmates’ stories about family or friends in the army offered much food for thought. Participating in drills, blackouts, and siren responses—plus receiving protocols from the university and embassy and learning where the shelters are—foreshadowed what I would later experience in my research program at Tel Aviv University, after a year studying Israel’s history and foreign policy at O.P. Jindal Global University.

Upon my arrival in Tel Aviv, I was aware of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, sporadic Houthi attacks from Yemen, and Hezbollah’s activity in southern Lebanon. Still, I never imagined I would be present during Operations Rising Lion and Midnight Hammer—a historic moment when Israel, with support from the United States, sought to stop the Iranian theocratic regime’s drive to acquire nuclear weapons.

I arrived on June 5 to research cyber-politics, governance, and the rise of responsible behavior in cyberspace. Five days later, I experienced my first air-raid siren. Walking in Jaffa, taking in the contrast between modern Tel Aviv and remnants of the Ottoman era, the alert sounded. I was with two Indian friends—both Hindu, one in my research program and the other a PhD student in journalism—and we looked for a shelter. As the siren began, the mosque’s call to prayer echoed; 15–20 minutes after we emerged, church bells rang. Hearing these sounds in sequence—in a place

that is home to millions of Jews and Arabs—was astonishing, a vivid convergence of major world religions.

Three days later, Operation Rising Lion—the 12-day war—began. My last months in India had familiarized me with drills, alerts, and protocols, but I hadn't needed to seek shelter there. In Israel, the pace and scale escalated beyond anything I had imagined. I adapted quickly, following Home Front Command instructions and doing what Israelis and locals did as ballistic missiles were launched from Tehran. My reality changed overnight.

Communicating with my family became its own challenge. Media coverage can be fragmentary or sensational, so I informed myself rigorously to brief them accurately—what was happening, how we were managing it, and how safe I was if I followed protocols. I urged them to limit unreliable sources because in moments like these, misinformation breeds anxiety and stress.

Shelters became unexpected classrooms. The bonding was real: I made new friends and exchanged perspectives on international relations, politics, law, war, religion, philosophy, and everyday concerns—parents and friends worrying at home, or others saying, “Just get into the shelter and we'll be fine.” We compared how our families and friends abroad perceived events and what information streams shaped those perceptions. The experience forces you to confront reality and the complexity of human responses under pressure.

Work helped keep my mind occupied, but disrupted sleep took its toll. Sirens in the early hours shattered deep rest, and some days, energy ran low. Still, the administrative side of crisis management offered another education: watching the machinery of states in motion, the extraction of citizens from a conflict zone, the cadence of embassy messages, governments negotiating corridors and airspace, the planning, budgets, and cooperation required from both large and small powers. Borders and air corridors opened and closed; prices for flights spiked just when people needed them most; routes shifted as some carriers operated and others suspended service. A few nations deployed dedicated planes or military aircraft, while others struggled to coordinate joint evacuations due to funding and logistical constraints. People weighed the risks differently; some rushed to leave, while others hesitated or stayed.

Conclusion

Amid all this, my core research focus—responsible behavior in cyberspace—felt urgent. Crises test not only physical security but also information integrity, resilience, and the choices individuals and institutions make under strain. One lesson I will carry forward is that planned decision-making matters most in a crisis. A clear game plan reduces risk and while we are alive, we can always transform, improve, and rebuild.