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# THE ISRAEL- PALESTINE CONFLICT

## DYNAMICS AND RESPONSES

CSS DIALOGUE REPORT

THE CENTRE FOR SECURITY STUDIES

# The Israel-Palestine Conflict: Dynamics and Responses

The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire at the hands of the Europeans created newly divided territories with multifaceted and contradicting ideas of nationalism. Civic, ethnic, and religious identities clashed as sovereignty became the prerogative of the strong. The rich and highly convoluted histories of the conflict between the modern state of Israel and its neighbouring region, Palestine, have been extensively studied through the lenses of culture, gender, security, and politics, among others. This dialogue report aims to build upon this literature by recording recent developments in the conflict engendered by globalisation, technological improvements, and new narratives of a multi-ethnic past. Through a meticulous analysis of regional and extra-regional dynamics, this report seeks the answers to burning questions about the future of the conflict and their implications for the international system.

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# DEFINING TERRITORIES

## Border Dynamics of the Israel-Palestine Conflict

*Samrudhi Pathak\**

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### Introduction

Israel has been undergoing border disputes since its inception. Since the 1948 War of Establishment, Israel has been struggling to define its borders and bring peace at its borders. The biggest question is, what led to Israel having so many disputes? The answer is: its struggle of identity in West Asian countries. When Israel came into existence under the Zionist movement, the Jewish community settled where Palestinians were dwelling. As such, the establishment of an entirely new country suddenly led to chaos in the region. Another question that occurs is, why couldn't these disputes be resolved for over 70 years? The answer is: leaders of Israel and Palestine and the unilateralism passed as heritage in Israel, and violence in Palestine. The policies adapted by David Ben Gurion and Golda Meir in Israel were very unilateral in nature. They prevented Israel from concluding any upcoming agreement. They maintained a principle of not going back to the pre-war border, and no withdrawal without direct negotiations<sup>1</sup>. Thus, Israel remains the way it is in West Asia. This report will decipher the disputes it continues to have with Palestine from the books of history through 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> Avi Shlaim. 2015. "Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World". 30 July. Penguin House.



Figure 1: Map of the State of Israel (Source: United Nations)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> UN Geospatial. 2004. "Israel". January 01. UN Geospatial. <https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/israel>

## The West Bank

After the Third Israeli-Arab war, Israel had captured the territory. West Bank is divided into 3 parts, Area A, B, and C. Area A is under Palestinian jurisdiction and is about 11% of the total land. Area B, which is 28%, is under Palestinian civil control but officially should not be under any country's control. Area C, about 68%, falls under Israeli administration<sup>3</sup>. Although it was annexed by Jordan in 1950, it is still part of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict

because the territory was recognized as a Palestinian territory according to the 1947 UN General Assembly recommendation. But as the Israel Knesset once said, "Arabs never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity". This plan was rejected by the Arabs since Palestine claimed the entire Israeli territory. In 1967, Israel attained control over the territory after the Third Israeli-Arab war. Although UN Security Council had called for the withdrawal of the IDF and the Israeli administration, Israel went on to increase its hold over the area and today controls more than half of it. Israel's argument and perspective depends on the legal status of West Bank. It says West Bank should be referred to as a 'disputed territory' and not an 'occupied territory' as it currently is, by the UN General Assembly, the UNSC and by some countries. This is because sovereignty over the region was not claimed by anybody until the Third Israeli-Arab War and even looking at the Oslo Accords, which took place much later, the sovereignty and status of West Bank was left to outcome of direct negotiations that would take place between Israel and Palestine<sup>4</sup>. Israel had even withdrawn IDF from West Bank after the Oslo Accords had gained some progress, but the Israeli settlements kept increasing.

The Israeli population increased from 1200 in 1967 to 310,000 in 2011. Meanwhile, the Palestinian population decreased from 320,000 to 56,000 in the same period<sup>5</sup>. This depicts the speed with which Israeli establishments are expanding in West Bank. This expansion brings problems for Palestinians, like the lack of accessibility over essential resources and the fact that the civil law applied in these regions is Israeli law.

## Jerusalem

The main site of dispute in Jerusalem is particularly East Jerusalem. Currently, Israel and Palestine both claim the entire city, they not only claim sovereignty but also recognize it as their capital. West Jerusalem is internationally seen as an Israeli territory, primarily, because

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<sup>3</sup> UN General Assembly. 2003. "Applicability of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and the other occupied Arab territories". 9 December. United Nations Treaty Series Vol. 75. No. 973.

<sup>4</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2003. "DISPUTED TERRITORIES: Forgotten facts about West Bank and Gaza strip". 1 February. Government of Israel.

<sup>5</sup> Nir Hasson. 2013. "How many Palestinians actually live in West Bank?". 10 January. Haaretz.

of huge Israeli presence in the region. But for East Jerusalem, most UN members believe that the final status of the site should be subject to the resolution through direct negotiations between the two parties. Some UN members even believe that Jerusalem can be declared as the capital of both countries. But irrespective of what views the UN, or its members have, the city remains disputed.

The UN Partition Plan of 1947 designated Jerusalem with a special status wherein neither of the claimants would have sovereignty over the city but that it would be administered by the UN itself<sup>6</sup>. Israel had even accepted the partition plan, but the Palestinians and Arabs rejected the plan completely. Thus, the status of the city remained undecided. Later, Jerusalem underwent what West Bank did. The Israeli settlements increased exponentially and to the extent that if today borders are to be drawn, the Israeli population present in the city cannot be overlooked.

Israel's arguments stand to claim the entire region and justify the expanding settlements. The Israel Knesset says that since the Arabs and Palestinians had rejected the 1947 Partition Plan, the partition plan, wherein West Bank and Jerusalem belong to Palestine, stands illegitimate. Thus, Jerusalem, particularly East Jerusalem, remains unclaimed as of now. The Israeli position has remained the same under every Prime Minister, be it Benjamin Netanyahu or Ehud Olmert. Jerusalem is not negotiable for Israel. Meanwhile, the position of the Palestinian National Authority is different. The PNA supports the idea of Jerusalem being an open city with freedom of religion and protection of religious sites. But ultimately, the bottom stance is that Jerusalem is not an Israeli territory. When the US announced the relocation of its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, Palestine charged the US in the International Court of Justice with the violation of the Vienna Convention of Diplomatic Relations. The verdict in this case has not been made by the ICJ yet.

## **The Gaza Strip**

Although the above two sites of conflicts mentioned hold emotional significance for Israel due to Zionist presence in Israeli nationalism, the Gaza Strip stands out as the most fragile part of the region because of its violence and political turmoil. The Gaza Strip is governed by Hamas, a former political party of Palestine, and is densely populated, with its population growth being 2.91% in 2020<sup>7</sup>.

After the conclusion of the Oslo Accords in May 1994, Israel under Yitzhak Rabin transferred the authority to PLO under Yasser Arafat. Thus, Israel did not claim its sovereignty over the territory after that. Yet the territory became the centre of Israel-Palestine conflict in the coming

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations Palestine Commission. 1948. "CONSIDERATIONS AFFECTING CERTAIN OF THE PROVISIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION ON THE "FUTURE GOVERNMENT OF PALESTINE": THE CITY OF JERUSALEM". 22 January. United Nations General Assembly.

<sup>7</sup> CIA. 2021. "The World Factbook- Gaza Strip". 29 June. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/gaza-strip/>



years because of the political turmoil it went through.

Even though Israel withdrew any claims of authority over the region and settled the dispute through negotiations, it built huge blockades after the Oslo Accords. The reason can be understood as, in 2000, a lot of suicide bombers had entered Israeli territory from Gaza. Thus, the permeable border imposed serious security threats. By 2005, the Israel Knesset formally declared that the Gaza Strip was free of any Israeli military presence. In 2006, the Palestinian National Elections were carried out and Hamas emerged as the party with the highest votes, and therefore made up its mind to form the government but no other party agreed to form a coalition with Hamas. As a result, Hamas separated and started governing Gaza anyway<sup>8</sup>. Thus, PNA governed only West Bank. In 2007, a civil war broke into Gaza, also known as

the Battle of Gaza, in which Hamas won and reached a position to claim authority over the territory. By then, the Palestine National Authority officially segregated itself from Hamas and made diplomatic agreements regarding it. In 2008, through Palestinian diplomatic missions, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan moved their embassy from Gaza to West Bank.

The present situation is very fragile in Gaza Strip, in fact more delicate than West Bank and Jerusalem. Egyptian and Israeli blockades exist on the Gaza Strip's borders and airspace, so it is difficult for the movement of goods or people to and from Gaza. Thus, Gaza's economy is collapsing, and the UN General Assembly has even produced a report suggesting that lifting the blockades is imperative for the Palestinian population in Gaza to survive. One of the reasons behind how Israel can easily create blockades for Gaza is that, under the Oslo Accords, Israel has access and authority over Gaza's airspace and sea space<sup>9</sup>. Not only Israel, but even Egypt has also created blockades for Gaza because of numerous reports of explosives and arms being smuggled to Gaza from Egyptian borders. Thus, Gaza becomes a serious security threat for Egypt too. Israel and Hamas got into serious armed conflicts in 2014, 2018, and 2021.

## **Golan Heights: The Conflict with Syria**

Israel not only has territorial disputes with Palestine but also with Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon. A few decades ago, it had disputes with Jordan which were resolved through the Armistice Agreement. With Syria, the dispute is over Golan Heights. Before the 6-day Arab-Israel war, the territory was mostly controlled by Syria. But post-war, the territory was occupied by Israel and like any other territory, even in Golan Heights, Israeli settlements began.

The Yom Kippur war was fought between Syria, Egypt, and Israel, post which Israel and Syria

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<sup>8</sup> John Pike. 2010. "HAMAS (Islamic Resistance Movement)". 27 May. GlobalSecurity.org <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hamas.html>

<sup>9</sup> ProCon.org. 2008. 1995 Oslo Interim Agreement. 24 April. <https://israelipalestinian.procon.org/background-resources/1995-oslo-interim-agreement/>

concluded a ceasefire agreement wherein Israel got access to a majority of Golan Heights through negotiations. On 14<sup>th</sup> December 1981, Israel passed the “Golan Heights Law”. Under this law, Israel would apply the same administration, domestic law, and jurisdiction to Golan Heights as it does to the rest of its territory<sup>10</sup>. This sparked a lot of controversy and debate in the international community as none of the UN members recognized Golan Heights as an official Israeli territory, except for the US who recognized Golan Heights as an integral part of Israel in March 2019.

Today, Israel’s position is that it claims the entirety of Golan Heights, meanwhile the Syrian stance remains that the borders that existed before the 1967 6-day war should be resumed. Israel and Syria have not signed any peace deal over it, yet. The situation for Syria has only worsened post-2012 as the Syrian civil war broke out that year, and Golan Heights became

one of the sites of war. Furthermore, in 2018, even the US, France, UK, Iran, and Israel got involved, having the entire territory undergo an air strike led by these countries. Unfortunately, it continues to be a violence and war prone area in 2021.

## Disputes with Egypt

Egypt, today, is Israel’s most important neighbour. Israel claims Egypt as its closest partner in the West Asian and North African region. However, many scholars term Israel-Egypt relations as “Cold Peace”<sup>11</sup>. Anyway, this relationship can prove to give lessons on establishing peace within the region. In 1973, the Yom Kippur War was fought between Israel and Egypt over the Sinai Peninsula. After the war, Israel had deployed its security forces on the peninsula. Thus, the Camp David Accords were concluded between Israel and Egypt in 1979 through the US mediation<sup>12</sup>. Later in the same year, a peace treaty was signed between the two countries, under which Israel withdrew all of its forces from the peninsula and agreed that an official border would be drawn. Thus, it took place as planned and Egypt became the first neighbour to recognize Israel as a country. A year later, in 1980, both countries established formal diplomatic relations and opened their Embassies in each other’s capital cities. Since then, the two countries have maintained peace for 40 years. One of the biggest reasons behind why this treaty could be concluded successfully is that Israel’s Armistice Agreement negotiations, by then, were turning out to be fruitless. So, Israel was eager to make peace with Egypt and therefore was ready to withdraw its forces from the peninsula. Finally, Israel could officially establish one of its borders as a result.

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<sup>10</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 1981. “Golan Heights Law”. 14 December. Government of Israel. <https://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/golan%20heights%20law.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> BBC News. 2011. “Egypt-Israel “Cold Peace” suffers a further chill”. 10 September. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14603812>

<sup>12</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 1978. “Camp David Accords”. 17 September. Government of Israel. <https://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/camp%20david%20accords.aspx>

## Disputes with Lebanon

This dispute started from the 1970's when the Palestine Liberation Organization carried out massacres in Israel. The IDF investigated and found out that these groups are operating from South Lebanon. Thus, Israel occupied those territories in an aim to eradicate the security threats. As a result, by 1978, Israel controlled the southern part of the country and Lebanon then protested in the UNSC against the Israeli invasion. In 2000, the UNSC demarcated a border known as "Blue Line" and adopted UNSC Resolution 425<sup>13</sup>. However, the resolution 425 was adopted in 1978 itself, under which the UN deployed its own interim forces to avoid further military occupation of Israel in Lebanon.

During this period in 1992, an extremist Shia Islamist militant group called "Hezbollah" rose to power in Lebanon. It has violated the Blue Line numerous times and continues to do so.

Since it imposes itself as a major security threat to Israel, both parties have either carried out border clashes or violated each other's air spaces.

## Disputes Prospects under PM Naftali Bennett

Counter-intuitively, the departure of former PM Benjamin Netanyahu looks to be worse, in terms of the Israel-Palestine peace process. PM Bennett has been taking more of an "anti-two state solution" stance. He has also promised to block the Palestinian statehood and annex at least 60% of West Bank<sup>14</sup>. He also advocates clustering Palestinian settlements together in the West Bank region and occupying the remaining territory. Not only in West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza but PM Bennett also champions the occupation of Golan Heights. Thus, border clashes and security threats to both sides are only going to increase in the coming years.

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<sup>13</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolutions. 1978. "Resolution 425: Israel-Lebanon". 19 March. UN Security Council. <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/425>

<sup>14</sup> Tom Bateman. 2021. "Israel's new PM Naftali Bennett promises to unite nation". 14 June. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-57464794>

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# DIVIDED OPINIONS AND CONFLICTING NARRATIVES

## Regional Responses to the Israel-Palestine Conflict

*Joseph Punnen\**

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The latest round of violence between the Israelis and Palestinians is happening because of their long, unresolved conflict that has been left to deteriorate, and the fighting we see in 2021 is born from more than a hundred years of struggle. Red flags began ticking off in mid-April 2021, during the start of the holy Muslim month, Ramadan. There were daily, violent clashes between the Israeli police and the Palestinians, and there were many cases of forced evictions of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem which inflamed the situation, resulting in violent face-to-face altercations and further devolving into an all-out war. This conflict had a mixed response from its neighbours and other organisations.

### Lebanon and Syria

Lebanon had a very mixed response to the violence in Gaza, with some wanting Lebanon to take more action and for them to stay in solidarity with Palestine, whereas with others like MP Bilal Abdallah stating that, *“Lebanon is facing an economic collapse and a vacuum in its political power, and the Palestine issue should not be put at the forefront.”* Another popular sentiment among the Lebanese public is that the issues faced by their own country should be dealt with first, before foreign affairs are considered. They also feel that Lebanon cannot afford to repeat the events of the 1960s, especially given the current crisis that the country is reeling under.<sup>2</sup> However on the 13th of May, three rockets were fired close to the coastal area of Qlaileh in southern Lebanon, near the Palestinian refugee camp. The Lebanese military were able to recover three high-tech Grad rockets around the vicinity of the Rashidieh Camp which was directly facing the Israeli settlements of Shlomi and Nahariya. Yet, no actors claimed responsibility for such attacks. The MP further addressed the issue by saying, *“Emotionally, we are all in solidarity with the Palestinians and distressed by the killing that is taking place against the innocent. There is no arguing on this matter. But expanding the war zone is a matter that needs to be studied.”*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Houssari, Najia. 2021. "Lebanese In War Of Words Over Palestine Action". *Arab News*. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1858881/middle-east>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

A series of attacks were also carried out by other actors inside Lebanon, where some decided to cut through the border fences and cross into Israel, eventually being met with resistance from the IDF (Israel Defense Forces). The same day, three rockets were fired from Syria, with two of them hitting the uninhabited places of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

## Egypt

Since the conflict has escalated, Egypt has condemned the Israeli attacks, along with their provocative actions in Gaza and against the Palestinians. However, Egypt has played a key role in brokering a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, following 11 days of cross-border fighting that left more than 250 individuals dead and hundreds wounded. President Fattah-Al-Sissi pledged half a billion dollars to rebuild Gaza. Even the French President, Emmanuel Macron, appeared to support Egypt by issuing a statement committing his *“renewed support for the Egyptian mediation”* in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Moreover, the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Sameh Shoukry, said at a United Nations Security Council meet, *“Egypt will support peace efforts until the Palestinian people obtain their legitimate rights and the region enjoys the stability that all our peoples seek,”*; he also stressed on the fact that *“the solution is the two-state solution that is acceptable to all parties.”*<sup>4</sup>

Cairo opened the Rafah crossing to dozens of Egyptian vehicles that entered Gaza to remove the rubble of destroyed buildings and pave the way for the reconstruction process. In addition, Cairo is also supplying goods to Gaza, in light of strict Israeli restrictions. The government has also taken measures by providing emergency medical care, food, and non-perishables as well as assistance to injured victims and their accompanying relatives crossing the borders to Egypt<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, the foreign ministers of Egypt, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have discussed the series of air attacks on Gaza with the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken.<sup>6</sup>

## Jordan

The Israeli actions resulted in Jordan blaming Israel for all the violence. They asked Israeli authorities to end 'provocations and aggression' against East Jerusalem's Palestinian population. Jordan said that Israel was “allowing extremists” to attack Palestinians in East Jerusalem, according to Haaretz<sup>7</sup>. The Jordanian Foreign Minister, Ayman Safadi, condemned these "racist attacks" by Israelis against the Palestinians in East Jerusalem in a statement, and called for *“international action to protect them”*. *“Jerusalem is a red line, and touching it, is*

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<sup>4</sup> "Macron And Sissi Urge Ceasefire In Gaza Conflict, What's Egypt's Role?". 2021. *Africanews*.

<https://www.africanews.com/2021/05/17/macron-and-sissi-urge-ceasefire-in-gaza-conflict-what-s-egypt-s-role/>

<sup>5</sup> "IOM Egypt Response Towards the Violence in Gaza". 2021. *International Organization for Migration*.

<https://egypt.iom.int/en/news/iom-egypt-response-towards-violence-gaza>

<sup>6</sup> "Qatari, Egyptian, Saudi FMs Discuss Gaza Crisis With Top US Envoy". 2021. *Aljazeera*.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/17/qatari-egyptian-saudi-fms-discuss-gaza-crisis-with-us-secretary>.

<sup>7</sup> "Jordan Accuses Israel of 'Allowing Extremists to Attack Palestinians' in East Jerusalem". 2021. *Haaretz*.

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-jordan-accuses-israel-of-allowing-extremists-to-attack-palestinians-in-jerusalem-1.9740482>

*playing with fire,"* he warned. King Abdullah of Jordan, who is considered the custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in East Jerusalem, has also condemned Israel and told them to respect the worshippers and the international law safeguarding the Arab rights.

Thousands of Jordanians also protested in front of Israel's Embassy in Amman, and demanded the Jordanian government to end its peace deal with Israel. The protestors were chanting "*No*

*Jewish embassy on Arab land!"*, "*Revenge...revenge...Oh, Hamas, bomb Tel Aviv!*"<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the Jordanian Parliament unanimously carried a motion urging the government to expel Israel's ambassador from Amman, in protest over Israeli "crimes" against Palestinians.

## Iran

The conflict with Israel serves Iran's interests by enhancing Hamas' role in the Palestinian movement and by posing to be Iran's leverage in a shadow war with Israel. Iran's alliance with Hamas and other armed groups might improve Iran's ability to extract U.S. concessions in the nuclear negotiations with the Biden administration. The Iran-Hamas relationship demonstrates that Iran is able to ally with and attract support from Sunni groups, as well as from Shia Muslim factions. Moreover, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called for Palestinians on Tuesday to build up their fighting power to stop Israel's "brutality", claiming that Israelis "only understand the language of force", when the conflict broke out. "Zionists understand nothing but the language of force, so the Palestinians must increase their power and resistance to force the criminals to surrender and stop their brutal acts," Ayatollah Khamenei said<sup>9</sup>.

## Saudi Arabia

When the conflict broke out, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister asserted that the escalation of violence in Gaza and East Jerusalem had to stop, while expressing the Kingdom's solidarity with the Palestinian people. Prince Faisal bin Farhan maintained that the Saudi position on Palestine was clear, namely, reaching a permanent solution in accordance with the Arab initiative and accepting a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital. He also urged the international community to step up and voice their opinion against Israel, to end this "dangerous escalation", to halt all sorts of military operations, and to push for peace talks based on a "two-state solution".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Jordanians Protest Against Israel Over Al Aqsa Violence". 2021. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/jordanians-protest-against-israel-over-al-aqsa-violence-2021-05-10/>.

<sup>9</sup> "Iran's Khamenei urges Palestinians to build up power to stop Israeli 'brutality'". 2021. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/irans-khamenei-urges-palestinians-build-up-power-stop-israeli-brutality-2021-05-11/>

<sup>10</sup> "Saudi Arabia Condemns Israel For 'Flagrant Violations' In Gaza". 2021. *Aljazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/16/saudi-arabia-condemns-israel-over-flagrant-violations-in-gaza>.

## United Arab Emirates and Bahrain

The government of UAE (one of the signatories of the Abraham Accords) openly expressed their criticism over the violence in east Jerusalem, especially with regards to the storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque by the Israeli security forces, and Jewish settlers attempts to evict Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. Such a statement was a rare rebuke from the UAE, wherein the foreign ministry condemned the “*acts of violence committed by right-wing extremist groups in the occupied East Jerusalem*” and has told the Israeli authorities to “*assume responsibility toward de-escalation and putting an end to all aggressions and practices that perpetuate tension and hostility.*” They even went to the point of criticising Israel by stating that it was necessary to preserve the identity of Jerusalem and maintain “*maximum self-restraint to avoid the region slipping into new levels of instability in a way that threatens peace.*”<sup>11</sup>

The UAE also lashed out against Hamas and urged for them to curb their terrorist activities in the Gaza region, as it has an adverse effect on Emirati investments based in the region. They said that they will continue to invest in Gaza, provided there could be peace in the area, or else Abu Dhabi would have to pull out of all the investments they had made in the very fragile region. However, despite all of the criticism, UAE silently opened its embassy in Tel Aviv; the inking of a bilateral tax treaty and a plan to open an Israeli economic attaché office in Abu Dhabi were reported to have happened by Israeli media, against the backdrop of the tight UAE media.<sup>12</sup> Bahrain, another signatory to the Abraham Accords, has raised its concern and stressed on the need to de-escalate the conflict. Moreover, the conflict was rarely covered in the state media as well.

## The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

The OIC is a group consisting of 57 Muslim-majority states. The organisation projects itself as a ‘collective voice for the Muslim world’ and has faced criticism and backlash for its ‘weak and feeble’ response over Israeli acts of violence against Palestinians. Many scholars and researchers have criticised the OIC for their lack of efforts towards the ongoing crisis, which is ironic due to the fact that the entire organisation was formed in response to an Israeli arson attack on the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem in 1969. According to the director of the Centre for Islam and Global Affairs at Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, “*If you look at the actions of the OIC and the countries it is very feeble, it is very weak*”<sup>13</sup>. The charter of the OIC also states that Jeddah would be the temporary headquarters of the organisation until “*the liberation*

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<sup>11</sup>Batrawy, Aya. 2021. "UAE Urges Israel To Stop Jerusalem Violence In Rare Rebuke". *Associated Press*. <https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-israel-united-arab-emirates-violence-dubai-4a48688bbe106ca7d931d148c205fdd3>.

<sup>12</sup> "UAE Does Business With Israel More Quietly Following Gaza Violence". 2021. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/uae-does-business-with-israel-more-quietly-following-gaza-violence-2021-06-02/>.

<sup>13</sup> “OIC slammed for its ‘weak’ response to Israeli violence on Palestine”. 2021. *TRT World*. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/oic-slammed-for-its-weak-response-to-israeli-violence-on-palestine-46733>

of the city of Al Quds (Jerusalem) so that it will become the permanent headquarters of the organisation". However, despite such statements, their actions were the complete opposite.<sup>14</sup>

Despite their lack of actions, the OIC has called for an immediate end to Israel's 'barbaric attacks' on Gaza and accused the only non-Muslim state in the region of engaging in "systematic crimes" and violence. They also called on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to urgently take action to stop these attacks by the Israeli forces. They even warned the UNSC that if they fail to take the actions, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) could be approached to assume its responsibility in this case.<sup>15</sup>

## Arab League

The Arab League has also openly condemned the actions of Israel over Palestinians and has termed it as "indiscriminate and irresponsible." The Arab League chief, Ahmed Aboul Gheit stated that, "*Israeli violations in Jerusalem, and the government's tolerance of Jewish extremist's hostile to Palestinians and Arabs, is what led to the ignition of the situation in this dangerous way.*" The attacks in Gaza were a "*miserable show of force at the expense of children's blood*", he also stated that such Israeli actions were very much targeted against the Muslims on the auspicious month of Ramadan.<sup>16</sup> In a virtual Arab League foreign ministers meeting, they held Israel "*fully responsible for whatever follows due to its crimes, which constitute glaring violations of U.N. decrees, international law and human rights law.*" They also called for the UNSC to "*immediately stop the Israeli aggression and provide the necessary protection for the Palestinian people and uphold their right to worship freely and safely.*"<sup>17</sup>

## The Gulf Cooperation Council

All six members of the GCC have collectively condemned the attempt by Israeli settlers to seize Palestinian properties in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem and the Israeli armed forces' incursions into the Al-Aqsa Mosque during prayers. However, their response was sort of half-hearted, and even before the latest crisis, the Gulf Leaders often chose to ignore the Palestinian issue in public, as they were more aligned to the U.S. and would rather see to the issue of Iran being solved. These states have often voiced their support towards Israel as the state dealt with Hamas and other Gaza-based militant groups backed by Tehran.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "OIC Slammed For Its 'Weak' Response To Israeli Violence On Palestine". 2021. *Trtworld*.

<https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/oic-slammed-for-its-weak-response-to-israeli-violence-on-palestine-46733>.

<sup>15</sup> Syed, Baqir Sajjad. 2021. "OIC Asks UNSC To Intervene For End To Israeli Attacks". *DAWN*.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1623974>.

<sup>16</sup> "Arab League Condemns Israeli Air Strikes On Gaza". 2021. *Aljazeera*.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/11/arab-league-condemns-israel-airstrikes-on-gaza-as-irresponsible>.

<sup>17</sup> "Arab League, Turkey Condemn Israeli Actions In Jerusalem, Gaza". 2021. *Reuters*.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/arab-league-chief-condemns-israeli-air-strikes-gaza-2021-05-11/>.

<sup>18</sup> Daragahi, Borzou. 2021. "Why The Latest Israel-Gaza Conflict Could Prove An International Game Changer". *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/israel-gaza-international-conflict-reaction-b1846580.html>.



So far, the ceasefire has not been broken, with both sides claiming victory, however, it is very questionable as to whether this peace will endure, especially with the new right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett. It is entirely possible that such incidents could occur again, unless and until a two-state solution has been found. Both sides need to make concessions in order to achieve peace.

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# DISSECTING THE 2021 CONFLICT

## Extra-Regional Actors and their Influence

*Swati Batchu\**

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The Middle East has been a hot bed of conflict ever since the end of the First World War. Given the nature of the international order, the complex interconnectedness of geopolitical interests, and long histories of intervention, national conflicts seldom remain national over time. It can be argued that nowhere are these factors in fuller display than in the Israel-Palestine Conflict. Post-colonial land politics and regional and international involvement in both entity's politics has created a web of economic, geopolitical, and security interests. This report deals with the various extra-regional actors who have a credible stake in the affairs of the region and/or the Israel-Palestine conflict. A handful of key actors stand out in terms of Israeli-Palestinian politics and regional politics. These are the US, the EU, France, Russia, India, and China. Many other international actors also hold stakes (such as the UK) but have not been included as they had been rather passive during the most recent round of violence.

### The United States of America

The US has both, one of the deepest histories of involvement in Israeli-Palestinian politics and serious stakes in regional stability. The past administrations have taken drastically different approaches to conflict between the two, with the Biden administration putting the conflict on the backburner in its Middle East policies. Unlike previous administration, there is no clear framework solution to the conflict being offered. Instead, the current government is resembling previous administrations in its support for a two-state solution and is emphasizing restoring connections with the Palestinian Authorities<sup>1</sup>.

In this context of the 11-day conflict, this has translated into several diplomatic measures. First, the United States has resumed the provision of previously halted aid and provided additional aid, considering the conflict<sup>2</sup>. Second, it has also iterated its intention to reopen the US consulate in Gaza which was shut down by the Trump administration. Third, there had also been considerable pressure on Netanyahu from the Biden Administration to halt violence

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<sup>1</sup> BBC, "Biden administration to restore \$235m in US aid to Palestinians", April 7, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56665199>

<sup>2</sup> Deirdre Shesgreen, "Biden administration will reopen US consulate in Jerusalem in a bid to repair ties with Palestinians," USA Today, May 25, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2021/05/25/jerusalems-us-consulate-reopen-reversing-trump-era-closure/7426894002/>

immediately, during the conflict. A consequence of this shift in policy is that the US is no

longer looking to dedicate resources to immediate negotiation or conflict resolution mechanisms. Instead, the intention is to take long-term steps to produce an environment where negotiations will be likely to succeed. These steps include:

1. Focus on humanitarian and urgent reconstruction needs in Gaza.
2. Address Israeli and Palestinian actions that will reduce tension and minimize or prevent renewed violence.
3. Build on prior steps to improve, over time, people's lives and add a sense of dignity and hope<sup>3</sup>.

It must be noted here that these steps in no way seem to have reduced support for Israel's military ambitions and political position. The Biden administration may be allocating as much as \$310M<sup>4</sup> to aid towards Palestine, but that number dwindles in comparison to the \$3.8 Billion in US-Israel military aid<sup>5</sup>.

## European Union

The EU's response to the crisis has been very tepid. While the regional organization vocalized calls for a ceasefire during the 11-day war, it fell short of any substantial condemnation of violations of human rights, violence, etc. A central cause for this has been the internal disagreements between various EU member states. Politico<sup>6</sup> notes instances where pro-Israeli states in the EU, such as Hungary, have blocked statements that may be understood as harsh criticisms of the Netanyahu regime's approach to the conflict. A frequent line of thinking present within the EU, but is not common to all EU members, is the association that support for Israel is necessary to protect it from the terrorist threat of Hamas. Such a perspective obscures the damage that Israeli attacks have done on civilians and on civilian infrastructure.

Beyond a statement calling for a ceasefire, the EU also made assurances of aid provision. However, other than these steps, the EU has been a relatively passive player in attempting to halt the conflict. The body has failed to adequately capitalize on the Middle East Quartet Framework for negotiations, that includes major extra-regional players like the United States, the United Nations, and Russia. A shift away from this position will be necessary if the EU intends to make tangible progress in reducing violence in the region, particularly given the US reluctance to pour extensive resources into the decades old conflict.

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<sup>3</sup> [Ambassador Hesham Youssef](#), "10 Things to Know: Biden's Approach to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", United States Institute of Peace, June 10, 2021, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/06/10-things-know-bidens-approach-israeli-palestinian-conflict>

<sup>4</sup> [Deirdre Shesgreen](#), "Biden administration will reopen US consulate in Jerusalem in a bid to repair ties with Palestinians," USA Today, May 25, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2021/05/25/jeruselems-us-consulate-reopen-reversing-trump-era-closure/7426894002/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> [David M. Herszenhorn](#) and [Rym Momtaz](#), "EU divisions over Israel-Palestine leave Brussels powerless as conflict worsens", The Politico, May 17, 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-divisions-israel-palestine-conflict-middle-east/>

While the EU as a unitary entity did not take substantial steps to condemn regional actors, leverage its regional role to forward negotiations, or to reduce militancy on both ends, some EU member states have been considerably more proactive. Here, France is a particularly notable European player.

### *France*

France took a predominantly pro-Israeli stance in policy but had been a highly active player in the regional and international efforts to calm tensions during the 2021 conflict. Where the EU's response was reserved, France's activism made the country somewhat of a leader among EU states working on the resolution of the recent conflict. France put forth a UNSC resolution seeking to establish an international call for ceasefire, given the little pressure on Israel to do so from the US. Indeed, the United States had been actively blocking the INGO's apex forum from making a statement on the conflict<sup>7</sup>. Other than the United States, France was a key international mediator who worked with regional powers like Egypt and Jordan to negotiate a ceasefire. Noted to be "engaged in intense diplomacy" with his American, Israeli and Palestinian counterparts, Macron took a personal interest and initiative to mediating this conflict.

It must also be noted here that the frequent recognition of Hamas, the armed group primarily responsible for violence from the Gazan side, as a terrorist group proved to be a significant hurdle in facilitating negotiations. France, also not recognizing Hamas as a legitimate political authority, was only left with the avenue of negotiating with the Palestinian Authority that holds no communication channels with Hamas due to mutual political rivalry. This issue was also evident in the US, in efforts to find credible solutions towards a ceasefire. While France has expressed its commitment to Israeli rights, it has also been much more vocal than some of its contemporaries in outlining the illegal nature of the Israeli occupation and the importance of the "perversion of the historical status quo at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound"<sup>8</sup>. France also supports the two-state solution.

### **China**

Chinese influence in the Middle East is a rising phenomenon. As a rising state with great power ambitions, China is increasingly looking to establish itself as reliable fresh face in the Middle East. The recent conflict served a poignant reminder to China of the volatility of one of the oldest conflicts of the region. It also provided an opportunity to examine how the country would react to evolutions in the Israel-Palestine conflict given that within China's regional plans,

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<sup>7</sup> The Associated Press, "The Latest: France seeks UN Security Council resolution", The Associated Press, May 19, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-middle-east-europe-israel-palestinian-conflict-business-3677c13020a928bb9ee3fed6cd685c12>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Israel is set to play an increasingly important role. For instance, both countries exchange knowledge on military technologies and coordinate closely on matters of economic

development. PRC's signature "Belt and Road Initiative" includes a railway passing through Ashdod, South of Tel Aviv, port expansion projects being done in collaboration with Chinese investors, or the sales of military technology such as drones. Yet, China also wishes to portray itself as the peaceable and fair external actor within the regional setting to set itself apart from the US whose position, China has stated, "is dictated by its closeness with the relevant sides"<sup>9</sup>.

On a diplomatic and policy-oriented note, China supports the two-state solution as well. It also extends support for the Palestinian side in its demands for an independent state. This is backed up by a long history of support for the PLO. During the 11-day conflict, China strongly condemned Israel's acts of "violence, intimidation, and provocation" towards Gaza and the West Bank<sup>10</sup>. It also started a motion within the UNSC to issue a call for ceasefire from the UN which was blocked by the United States, that was engaged in efforts to mediate with Egypt at that time. As the current president of the UNSC, it also held relatively greater sway within the UNSC to lobby and present its resolution along with the four-point peace plan it laid out for the crisis. The four-point peace plan is a short framework outlining China's vision for peace in the region, not only considering the recent conflict but also in terms of broader solutions to the conflict. The four points summarized here, are as follows:

- Ceasefire and cessation of violence is the top priority and China demands restraint on the part of the Israeli government.
- Provision of humanitarian assistance and for Israel to earnestly fulfil its obligations under international treaties.
- International support and UNSC activism to materialize the two-state solution. Particularly, China calls on the United States to shoulder responsibility to ease conflict within the UNSC
- A "two-state solution" as the fundamental solution.<sup>11</sup>

China's response to the Israel-Gaza crisis is particularly important. While the Netanyahu administration was willing, even if it was unable, to more fully collaborate with Chinese authorities, given the pivotal transfer of power to the new coalition government in Israel, their perspective towards Israel-China relations is yet to be seen. China's strong stance against the US in the UNSC may not resonate with the new collation. A New York Times report particularly notes that the current Israeli government is looking to re-enforce its relationship with the US Democratic Party and return to a bipartisan standing in its US Foreign Policy<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Mu Cui, "Israel-Gaza crisis: China fears instability in Middle East", Deutsche Welle, May 19, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/israel-gaza-china-conflict/a-57586757>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Xinhuan, "China puts forward four-point proposal regarding Palestine-Israel conflict", Xinhua, May 17, 2021, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/17/c\\_139950043.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/17/c_139950043.htm)

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Kingsley and Adam Rasgon, "Israel's New Coalition Takes First Steps, Including Mending Fences With U.S.",

This closer association would give the United States further space to monitor and direct Israeli policy. In that scenario, a strongly anti-US China may not be conducive to increasing partnerships. Finally, while China and Palestine share decades of association and China spoke up against increasing violence in Gaza, Figueroa<sup>13</sup> notes that China's four-point peace plan neither provides any novel additions to various existing frameworks, nor does it incorporate the more sensitive positions adopted by the Arab states and Palestinians regarding the conflict (such as the status of Jerusalem or the Palestinian refugees).

## Russia

Russia's approach to the conflict is primarily marked by its attempts to maintain neutrality. Without taking strong, explicit stances one way or another, the Russian authority has instead chosen to more broadly advocate for a peaceful resolution of escalating violence. Using the UNSC platform, where it is a permanent member, it has condemned violence from both sides. Like several other actors discussed here previously, the Russian Federation supports the two-state solution as the framework for the future states of Israel and Palestine and considered the framework to be central to the conclusion of the 11-day war. Russia's suggested route for mediation was through the Middle East Quartet Framework<sup>14</sup>. However, given that the United States and the EU were less than enthusiastic about a multilateral mediation operation, it can be gleaned that the likelihood of the Middle East Quartet being successfully instrumentalized was low. At the start of June 2021, after a successful ceasefire, Russia also presented itself as a possible mediatory agent for the Israel-Palestine conflict<sup>15</sup>.

It should also be noted that there was little direct discussion between Putin, his cabinet, and Israeli and Palestinian authorities about the violence when it was ongoing. Beyond a proposal for mediation weeks after the end of violence across the Israel-Gaza border, direct channel communications are noted to have not occurred until Russia's diplomacy at the UNSC summit<sup>16</sup>. However, Russian officials at the UN were also quoted as saying that the instability caused by the Israel-Gaza conflict "directly concerns our security interests" as "the escalation of hostilities in the Middle East was taking place in proximity to Russia"<sup>17</sup>. This broadens the idea of Russia's extended borders and thus redefines how geopolitics between Russia and

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The New York Times, June 14, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/14/world/middleeast/israel-coalition-march-amas.html>

<sup>13</sup> William Figueroa, "Can China's Israel-Palestine Peace Plan Work?", *The Diplomat*, May 25, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/05/can-chinas-israel-palestine-peace-plan-work/>

<sup>14</sup> Danil Bochkov, "What Are China and Russia Saying About the Israel-Palestine Conflict?", *The Diplomat*, May 21, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/05/what-are-china-and-russia-saying-about-the-israel-palestine-conflict/>

<sup>15</sup> Elena Teslov, "Russia ready to organizing direct Palestinian-Israeli talks", *Anadolu Agency*, May 17, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/palestine-under-attack/russia-ready-to-organize-direct-palestinian-israeli-talks/2244680>

<sup>16</sup> Marianna Belenkaya, "Russia's Timid Approach to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", *The Moscow Times*, May 18, 2021, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/05/18/russias-timid-approach-to-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict-a73930>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

Middle Eastern states are considered, making affairs of the two much more closely intertwined.

Given the above information on Russia's stakes in the conflict, its timid stance during the recent crisis might seem counter intuitive. Stating that the conflict takes place in proximity to Russia and effects Russian interest may lead one to think that it would warrant more to a concerted effort to mediate, condemn, or provide humanitarian assistance beyond mere offerings or statement making. Yet, it can be seen that this is largely absent as Russia bent towards a neutral leaning. According to the Arab Weekly<sup>18</sup>, one reason for this could be that Russia is attempting to simply monitor the conflict from afar while offering occasional assistance without fully committing its national resources. During this time, it would wait for the opportune moment to enter and gain a controlling stake in the conflict. Regardless of whether this is intended by Russian policy makers or military strategists, it is undeniable that Russia continues to be an important stakeholder in the wider region and its conflicts. Thus, it is likely that it will keenly monitor the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as it has in the past, as well.

## India

India's position on the recent conflict was one of maintaining a delicate balance between itself and the two warring parties. With a deep history of commitment for the Palestinian cause and a strengthening relationship with the Israeli state, India was walking a tightrope during its UNSC statement. India was one of the first non-Arab states to recognize the Palestinian state when it declared itself as such and showed public commitment to Arab partners over the Israeli state in its initial days<sup>19</sup>. Indeed, while India recognized the Israeli state in 1950, it did not establish formal diplomatic connections with the country until 1992. This turn of events however indicated a change in attitudes in the Indian establishment, one that increasingly favoured a strengthening Israel and wished to formalize the decades of clandestine cooperation that the two countries already had. In the present, the connection between the current Modi government and the former Netanyahu government grew extensively as Israel became the second largest provider of arms to India. These interconnections guide India's response in the UNSC.

India's carefully crafted statement blamed both Israel and Hamas for escalating violence and called on for the "immediate de-escalation" of tension<sup>20</sup>. Its other statements lend some insight into whether India considers the violence from either side as emerging for a legitimate cause. On one hand, it issued its "strong support to the just Palestinian cause"; yet on the other hand

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<sup>18</sup> The Arab Weekly, "Considerations over presence in Syria restrain Russia's reactions to Israel-Hamas fighting" The Arab Weekly, May 18, 2021, <https://thearabweekly.com/considerations-over-presence-syria-restrain-russias-reactions-israel-hamas-fighting>

<sup>19</sup> Manavi Kapur, "How India's relations with the Israelis and Palestinians changed from Nehru to Modi", May 21, 2021, <https://qz.com/india/2011400/indias-stance-on-israel-palestine-conflict-from-nehru-to-modi/>

<sup>20</sup> Anoop Kumar Gupta, "India's Stance on the Israel-Gaza Conflict", The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, June 6, 2021, <https://besacenter.org/india-israel-gaza-conflict/>

it also condemned the “indiscriminate rocket firings from Gaza into Israel”<sup>2122</sup>. In this, while India may consider the pursuit of Palestinian nationhood itself to be a legitimate cause, it does not consider Hamas to be a legitimate actor to pursue that goal. On the other hand, the Indian mention of the Gazan rocket firings and its support for Israel’s right to self-defence shows a clear intention to support the Israeli state. Its sensitivity to the Israeli and Palestinian position was also clear in its reference to the disruption of the status quo at the “holy places of Jerusalem, including the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount”, indicating the importance of the site to both Jews and Muslims<sup>23</sup>. Such careful balancing also marked the remaining of the statement made by India, that suggested a hold on the eviction of Arab families in Sheikh Jarrah and for negotiations for peace under the two-state solution. Post ceasefire, India has also been at the forefront of warnings issued, considering instances of re-escalating violence as airstrikes on Gaza resumed. Thus, the imperative to balance ties between the two states remains.

## Conclusion

Regional responses to the Israel-Gaza crisis are crucial as they are a telling of changing sentiments towards the Middle East’s prolonged conflicts. The country accounts presented here largely indicate increasing fatigue in the United States and parts of the European Union for involvement in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Once the underdog, Israel has also improved its positioning substantially, in terms of its military strength and its diplomatic relationship with its former Arab rivals. These realities are likely to dictate the contours of the regional and international responses to any future conflicts. States such as India, who wish to capitalize on Israel’s military developments, are thus put in increasingly precarious diplomatic positions as they are forced to balance between real politic and historical commitment to the Palestinian cause and the two-state solution.

On one hand, while traditional extra-regional actors such as the US, Europe, and Russia seem increasingly hesitant, it seems that a rising state such as China is eager to fill the gap. China’s increased involvement in the region is indicative of its larger ambitions on the world stage. Within this context, it is possible that the Middle East might become another space where the mission to balance China is carried forward. Finally, extra regional involvement also seems to be further complicated based on the internal politics of Palestine. Hamas’ status as a terrorist organization and its disconnection with the internationally recognized Palestinian Liberation Organization complicated any efforts for involvement in the two parties’ conflict.

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<sup>21</sup> Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, “India reiterates strong support for ‘just Palestinian cause’”, The Economic Times, May 17, 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-calls-for-early-resumption-of-direct-dialogue-between-israel-palestine/articleshow/82698079.cms>

<sup>22</sup> The Week, “Israel-Palestine conflict: India condemns ‘indiscriminate rocket firing’ from Gaza”, The Week, May 16, 2021, <https://www.theweek.in/news/world/2021/05/16/israel-palestine-conflict-india-condemns-indiscriminate-rocket-firing-from-gaza.html>

<sup>23</sup> Anoop Kumar Gupta, “India’s Stance on the Israel-Gaza Conflict”, The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, June 6, 2021, <https://besacenter.org/india-israel-gaza-conflict/>



Cumulatively, the recent conflict and Israeli diplomatic activities in the region largely indicate that the status quo of the region (in terms of its relationship with Israel) is slowly shifting. Whether this will eventually result in continued fatigue in international actors towards this protracted conflict is yet to be seen.

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# AIMING FOR PEACE

## *Governmental Resolution, Peacebuilding Mechanisms, and Organization*

*Sonal Mitra\**

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The Israel-Palestine conflict is the ongoing skirmish between Israel and Palestine that started in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and has significantly impacted the Middle East for the past 70 years. An all-inclusive and compendious diplomatic solution has eluded global attempts, leaving spectators disenchanted about the likelihood of peace and stability. Large scale violence on both sides have left communities apprehensive and fearing for their lives, facilitating the conflict for extremist's activities, consequently stipulating international deliberation. The conflict is comprehensive, and it is also plied in reference to the previous stages of the Israel-Palestine conflict, between the Zionist Yeshu and the Arabs residing in Palestine under the Ottoman and British authority, constituting the foundation of the recent conflict. The persisting and unresolved issues like the border security, authority of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, and the refugee problem also play a crucial role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The violence that ensued from the skirmish between the two nations has evoked international and human rights concern, in both the nations and globally.

The contemporary conflict between Israel and Palestine is a repercussion of a series of controversial Israeli actions in Jerusalem. Both nations have continued attacks for several days, followed by the death of many innocent people and extensive destruction. Simultaneously, communal violence between Arabs and Jewish Israelis has erupted in Israel with an intensity never witnessed before, which is a perturbing indication of how disintegrated the Israeli society has become. Conventionally, both Israel and Palestine have either independently agreed to put an end to the bombing or consented to a globally mediated ceasefire. However, this has not transformed the primary discourse of the conflict. The Oslo accords were the last formal initiative towards determining a solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The accords were delineated as a confidence-building step to build trust between both nations. However, just after a decade, the region was embroiled in a war. The failure of the Oslo accords can be attributed to how both Israel and Palestine did not realize that the accords were meant to be an interim agreement as a harbinger to the contemplated laborious negotiations for a solution between the two. The Oslo accords would have resulted in the peaceful de-escalation of the conflict if it not for the unfortunate assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

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The recent contestation between Israel and Palestine is an appalling reminder of how profound the gap between both the nations is, in achieving a coherent form of peace. Israel has been unable to provide Palestinians the justice and assistance that could bring balance and understanding, with regards to a new state solution. Israeli politics slumped from an efficiently functioning democracy to a nation that is determined on the unscrupulous annexation and employment of force over the peace processes. On the other hand, the Palestinian government in the West Bank has manifested to be equally reluctant to reach a mutual understanding. They attempted to use violence when it was distinctly evident that their possibility of winning the conflict was meagre<sup>1</sup>. The Hamas in Gaza has also been dependent on escalated levels of violence that consequently triggered an Israeli reaction. Religion has also played a significant role in the recent conflict; even though it is not a state or a coherent political movement, it has profoundly distinguished Israeli Jews from the Palestinian community.<sup>2</sup>

The violence and protests for the authority of the Al Aqsa Mosque, Temple complex, attempts to push Palestinians out of East Jerusalem and the city's suburbs, and the dispute over making some part of Palestine's capital<sup>3</sup>, have ensued to be a crucial impediment to a long-term resolution. The Israeli authority has been perceived to have been rather coercive and with the leadership of the former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel denied any form of settlement and conciliation with the Palestinian authority. The question that arises now is, with the new Prime Minister Neftali Bennett in power, what are the chances of mediation between Israel and Palestine?

## Israeli Leadership

There is a notion that the new Israeli Prime Minister Neftali Bennett is going to be more iniquitous than the former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, conjecturing that he would endeavour to accomplish his motive to expand the illegal settlements more intensely. On the other hand, many anticipate that Neftali Bennett would grovel under international pressure. Nevertheless, he does not support the envisaged, "Two State solution". At the first coup d'état, there seems to be hardly any difference between him and Netanyahu since both resist the resumption of any form of concord that may compel them to integrate the ambitions of the Palestinians. The president of the Palestinian National Initiative Political party asserted that the new Israeli president will be more unscrupulous than Netanyahu, perceiving Bennett to have a more ideological and callous approach towards the Palestinians.

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<sup>1</sup> Cordesman, Anthony. 2021. "Israel and The Palestinians: From The Two-State Solution to Five Failed "States"". *Csis.Org*. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/israel-and-palestinians-two-state-solution-five-failed-states>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Naftali Bennett is a staunch right-wing politician in a nation where both right and left are usually an intermediary status for a laborious versus lenient stance on the *modus vivendi*, with regards to both Israel and Palestine. When the former Prime Minister of the United States,

Donald Trump proposed an idea to tackle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, propounding a plan broadly regarded to be majorly in favor of Israel, Bennett vehemently demurred to the idea on the basis that it compromised to create a state for the Palestinians. Alternatively, he insisted for the instantaneous annexation of all Israeli settlements. Neftali Bennett has himself contended to be more rightist than the former Prime Minister who was profoundly condemned for following belligerent right-wing policies in Israel and towards Palestine predominantly.

Bennett has vociferously articulated his aim of a Jewish state that extends the boundaries of Israel to encompass the West Bank and East Jerusalem. He has been at odds with the cessation of military action against Hamas in the Gaza Strip and also resistant towards Netanyahu's peace deal with Hamas in the year 2018.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, as denunciation of Israel specifically of its conduct towards Palestine has emerged even amidst its conventionally powerful proponents, endeavours to reinforce a bilateral relationship will need scrupulous deliberation by Neftali Bennett. Taking into consideration the recent conflict, there were not many attempts to actually stop it other than the ceasefire. Therefore, in this essence, none of these initiatives can be regarded as conflict resolution mechanisms or initiatives but, merely as conflict management mechanisms.

## A Two-State Solution

The only plausible solution for the Israeli and Palestinian conflict is the "*Two State Solution*". Even though Israel and Hamas acceded to a ceasefire, the fighting took the lives of around 250 innocent people and the fundamental status quo makes the fighting unavoidable in the future. Israel can be seen to be inveterate in the West Bank, establishing new Jewish settlements, making it even more challenging to envision a possible Palestinian nation on that land<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, the Palestinian authority has been profoundly disintegrated, making many believe that a two-state solution is not attainable. However, some analysts and experts assume that the two-state solution is the only solution that can bring peace between Israel and Palestine. The most conventionally suggested substitute is the one state solution which, if implemented would unite Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza strip into a single democratic nation with equal rights for both Arabs and Jews<sup>6</sup>. This way neither the Palestinian community have a land to call as being their own, rather being compelled to integrate a massive Jewish population. Nevertheless, the one state solution is improbable to be implemented since it compels Israel, the most dominant player, to give up the reason for its existence. Israel is expected to choose

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<sup>4</sup> Dutta, Prabhash. 2021. "Meet Naftali Bennett, Israeli Prime Minister Who Ousted His Guru Benjamin Netanyahu". *India Today*. <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/meet-naftali-bennett-israeli-prime-minister-who-ousted-his-guru-benjamin-netanyahu-1814578-2021-06-14>.

<sup>5</sup> Beauchamp, Zack. 2021. "In Defense of The Two-State Solution". *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/22442052/israel-palestine-two-state-solution-gaza-hamas-one>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

to relinquish the West Bank settlements rather than renouncing Zionism<sup>7</sup>.

Therefore, the two-state solution continues to remain preferable over the one state solution and it is regarded as being the rational and pragmatic solution for administering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both the countries have constitutionally different characters and ideals, concerning the manner in which they prefer to be governed. Every point of the contention between Israel and Palestine appears to probably relate to the genesis of the tension and violence in the Middle East. “*Sources which vary from chaos and collapse in Lebanon, civil war and state terrorism in Syria, instability in Jordan, ethnic and sectarian tensions in Iraq, and Egypt’s uncertain stability and development*”<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, fundamental obstacles to long lasting conciliation and peace seem to be influenced by the Israeli and Palestinian conflict in the Middle East. It is certainly evident that even if all military, security, and financial issues in both nations are resolved, the contemporary conflict between Israel and Palestine would not come to an end. The conflict can end only when a long-term solution is envisioned and then truly executed. The international community along with the people of Israel and Palestine should not give up on the aim to achieve peace, however the no solution, solution to the recent fighting seems to be the most plausible consequence of the violent devastation in both Israel and Palestine.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



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