



Providing a Permanent Solution to the Israel-Palestine Conflict

Old Dominion University Model United Nations Society

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After Years of Quiet, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Exploded. Why Now?



The Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem last month, about a week before the start of Ramadan. Credit...Ahmad Gharabli/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

By Patrick Kingsley

Published May 15, 2021 Updated Nov. 2, 2021

JERUSALEM — Twenty-seven days before the first rocket was fired from [Gaza](#) this week, a squad of [Israeli](#) police officers entered the Aqsa Mosque in [Jerusalem](#), brushed the [Palestinian](#) attendants aside and strode across its vast limestone courtyard.

Then they cut the cables to the loudspeakers that broadcast prayers to the faithful from four medieval minarets.

It was the night of April 13, the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. It was

also Memorial Day in [Israel](#), which honors those who died fighting for the country.

The [Israeli](#) president was delivering a speech at the Western Wall, a sacred Jewish site that lies below the mosque, and Israeli officials were concerned that the prayers would drown it out.

The incident was confirmed by six mosque officials, three of whom witnessed it; the Israeli police declined to comment. In the outside world, it barely registered.

But in hindsight, the police raid on the mosque, one of the holiest sites in Islam, was one of several actions that led, less than a month later, to the [sudden resumption of war](#) between [Israel and Hamas](#), the militant group that rules the [Gaza Strip](#), and the outbreak of [civil unrest between Arabs and Jews](#) across Israel itself.

“This was the turning point,” said Sheikh Ekrima Sabri, the grand mufti of [Jerusalem](#). “Their actions would cause the situation to deteriorate.”

That deterioration has been far more devastating, far-reaching and fast-paced than anyone imagined. It has led to the worst violence between [Israelis and Palestinians](#) in years — not only in the conflict with Hamas, which has killed at least 145 people in Gaza and 12 in Israel, but in a wave of mob attacks in mixed Arab-Jewish cities in Israel.

It has spawned unrest in cities across the occupied West Bank, where Israeli forces killed 11 Palestinians on Friday. And it has resulted in the firing of rockets toward Israel from a [Palestinian refugee camp](#) in Lebanon, prompted Jordanians to march toward Israel in protest, and led Lebanese protesters to briefly cross their southern border with Israel.

The crisis came as the Israeli government was struggling for its survival; as Hamas — which Israel views as a terrorist group — was seeking to expand its role within the

Palestinian movement; and as a new generation of Palestinians was asserting its own values and goals.

And it was the outgrowth of years of blockades and restrictions in Gaza, decades of occupation in the West Bank, and decades more of discrimination against Arabs within the state of Israel, said Avraham Burg, a former speaker of the Israeli Parliament and former chairman of the World Zionist Organization.

“All the enriched uranium was already in place,” he said. “But you needed a trigger. And the trigger was the Aqsa Mosque.”

It had been seven years since the last significant conflict with Hamas, and 16 since the last major Palestinian uprising, or intifada.

There was no major unrest in Jerusalem when President Donald J. [Trump recognized the city as Israel’s capital](#) and nominally moved the United States Embassy there. There were no mass protests after four Arab countries [normalized relations with Israel](#), abandoning a long-held consensus that they would never do so until the Palestinian-Israeli conflict had been resolved.

Two months ago, few in the Israeli military establishment were expecting anything like this.

In private briefings, military officials said the biggest threat to Israel was 1,000 miles away in Iran, or across the northern border in Lebanon.

When diplomats met in March with the two generals who oversee administrative aspects of Israeli military affairs in Gaza and the West Bank, they found the pair relaxed about the possibility of significant violence and celebrating an extended period of relative quiet, according to a senior foreign diplomat who asked to remain anonymous in order to speak freely.

Gaza was struggling to overcome a wave of coronavirus infections. Most major Palestinian political factions, including Hamas, were looking toward Palestinian legislative elections scheduled for May, the first in 15 years. And in Gaza, where the Israeli blockade has contributed to an unemployment rate of about 50 percent, Hamas's popularity was dwindling as Palestinians spoke increasingly of the need to prioritize the economy over war. The mood began to shift in April.

The prayers at Aqsa for the first night of Ramadan on April 13 occurred as the Israeli president, Reuven Rivlin, was making his speech nearby.

The mosque leadership, which is overseen by the Jordanian government, had rejected an Israeli request to avoid broadcasting prayers during the speech, viewing the request as disrespectful, a public affairs officer at the mosque said.

So that night, the police raided the mosque and disconnected the speakers. "Without a doubt," said Sheikh Sabri, "it was clear to us that the Israeli police wanted to desecrate the Aqsa Mosque and the holy month of Ramadan."

A spokesman for the president denied that the speakers had been turned off, but later said they would double-check.

In another year, the episode might have been quickly forgotten. But last month, several factors suddenly and unexpectedly aligned that allowed this slight to snowball into a major showdown.

A resurgent sense of national identity among young Palestinians found expression not only in resistance to a series of raids on Al Aqsa, but also in protesting the plight of six Palestinian families facing expulsion from their homes. The perceived need to placate an increasingly assertive far right gave Benjamin [Netanyahu](#), Israel's caretaker prime minister, little incentive to calm the waters.

A sudden Palestinian political vacuum, and a grass-roots protest that it could adopt, gave Hamas an opportunity to flex its muscles.

These shifts in the Palestinian dynamics caught Israel unawares. Israelis had been complacent, nurtured by more than a decade of far-right governments that treated Palestinian demands for equality and statehood as a problem to be contained, not resolved.

"We have to wake up," said Ami Ayalon, a former director of the Israeli domestic intelligence agency, Shin Bet. "We have to change the way we understand all this, starting with the concept that the status quo is stable."

The loudspeaker incident was followed almost immediately by a police decision to close off a popular plaza outside the Damascus Gate, one of the main entrances to the Old City of Jerusalem. Young Palestinians typically gather there at night during Ramadan.

A police spokesman, Micky Rosenfeld, said the plaza was closed to prevent dangerously large crowds from forming there, and to head off the possibility of violence.

To Palestinians, it was another insult. It led to protests, which led to nightly clashes between the police and young men trying to reclaim the space.

To the police, the protests were disorder to be controlled. But to many Palestinians, being pushed out of the square was a slight, beneath which were much deeper grievances.

Most Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, which Israel occupied during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and later annexed, are not Israeli citizens by choice, because many say applying for citizenship would confer

legitimacy on an occupying power. So they cannot vote.

Many feel they are gradually being pushed out of Jerusalem. Restrictions on building permits force them to either leave the city or build illegal housing, which is vulnerable to demolition orders. So the decision to block Palestinians from a treasured communal space compounded the sense of discrimination that many have felt all their lives.

“It made it feel as though they were trying to eliminate our presence from the city,” said Majed al-Qeimari, a 27-year-old butcher from East Jerusalem. “We felt the need to stand up in their faces and make a point that we are here.”

The clashes at the Damascus Gate had repercussions. Later that week, Palestinian youths began attacking Jews. Some posted videos on TikTok, a social media site, garnering public attention. And that soon led to organized Jewish reprisals.

At the last minute, the government rerouted the Jerusalem Day march away from the Muslim Quarter, after receiving an intelligence briefing about the risk of escalation if it went ahead.

But that was too little, and far too late. By then, the Israeli Army had already begun to order civilians away from the Gaza perimeter.

Shortly after 6 p.m. on Monday, the rocket fire from Gaza began.



Brazil votes against Palestine at WHO assembly

Eman Abusidu

14 November 2020



It seems that what Brazil's current Minister of Foreign Affairs **Ernesto Araújo** said at the Brazilian Senate in **February 2020**: "There is unfortunately still vast anti-Israel bias in bodies like the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council. I realised that during the last 15 years, up to 80 per cent of the Human Rights Council's resolutions were against Israel", was not political flirtation, but a fact that Bolsonaro's government was

keen to implement. Since the start of Bolsonaro's presidency in October 2018, Brazil has drastically altered its foreign policy and strengthened its ties with Israel. After 15 years of regular voting for Palestine, Brazil has begun to vote in favour of Israel and against Palestine.

On 12 November, the biased position towards Israel has repeated once again. Brazil voted against the approval of a **resolution** at the World Health Organisation (WHO) to guarantee access to healthcare services for the Palestinian population residing in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. The draft decision was proposed by the delegations of Cuba, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar and other countries, requesting the director-general to implement a series of activities to support the development of services and healthcare provided to the Palestinian people.

The resolution was approved with 78 votes in favour and only 14 against, in addition to 32 abstentions. Israel, the US, some European countries and Australia voted against the proposal, in addition to Brazil. In turn, the Israeli embassy in Brazil thanked Brazil, through its Twitter account, for voting against this decision. It also confirmed: "Israel will continue to work with WHO to improve the health condition of Palestinians."

Commenting on this vote, the Palestinian Ambassador to Brazil Ibrahim Alzeben informed *MEMO* that Brazil's vote against Palestine is contrary to what Brazil believes. He also expressed: "We lament

this change in voting pattern at several forums for nearly two years. This change does not serve the peace process in the region and harms the rights of Palestinian people under occupation." The ambassador remarked on the historical relations between Palestinians and Brazil in particular, and the Arabs in general, which are characterised by cooperation, friendship and mutual respect. He addressed Brazil by requesting: "We call this friendly country to reconsider some issues that cause undue harm."

As for the Palestinian Arab Federation of Brazil (FEPAL), it seems that this vote is an unprecedented turn in Brazil's foreign policy, which is aligning with the protection of Israel's crimes in Palestine. FEPAL also **condemned** the Brazilian vote against the resolution in Palestine, asserting: "We, as Brazilians with Palestinian origins, reject this vote like most of the Brazilian people." FEPAL also asked the government of Brazil to review its position and return to its previous position of respect to international law and supremacy of human rights. FEPAL called on Brazilian society to continue its support of Palestine in its search for peace and justice.

That **wasn't the first time** that Brazil had voted against Palestine, and began its transformation towards supporting Israel at the UN. In February of this year, Brazil asked the International Criminal Court (ICC) to stop its investigation into Israel for war crimes committed against the Palestinian people. In March of last year, Brazil voted against a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council which: "Condemned Israel's apparent intentional

use of unlawful lethal and other excessive force against civilian protesters in Gaza and called for perpetrators of violations in the enclave to face justice."

Speaking to *MEMO*, the Brazilian ex-Minister of Health and the current Federal Deputy Alexandre Padilha, explains: "Bolsonaro deepens his isolation because he breaks the tradition of Brazilian foreign policy and thereby turns enemies, deepens isolation from his stance on the environmental issue, deepens his isolation in relation to Bolsonaro's stance that follows Trump in criticising the World Health Organisation."

Brazilian President Bolsonaro considers Trump his role model and was proud to be called the "Trump of Brazil". Vice-President Kamala Harris **claimed**: "We will restore aid to Palestinians, renew ties." So the question remains, will Brazil amend its positions in parallel with the new US administration that promises to restore relations with Palestine? Or will Brazil and Bolsonaro keep acting in favour of Israel? Bolsonaro has not yet congratulated Joe Biden on his victory over Trump in the US elections. Padilha has doubts that Bolsonaro's stance will change, even following Trump's defeat, clarifying: "Bolsonaro has a very strong relationship with Israel, and with the extreme right in Israel."

THE | DIPLOMAT

What Are China and Russia Saying About the Israel-Palestine Conflict?

Beijing and Moscow have taken up similar positions on the escalating violence in the Middle East.

By **Danil Bochkov**

21 May 2021



Smoke rises following Israeli airstrike, in Gaza City, 20 May 2021.

Credit: AP Photo

The long-running Israel-Palestine conflict [is in the midst of](#) the gravest escalation between the two parties in recent years, with the possibility that the situation will deteriorate into a “full scale war,” as the United Nations [warned](#). Israel has been [ramping](#) up attacks in the Gaza Strip by intensifying air operations, while Hamas has reportedly [launched](#) some 3,000 rockets into Israeli territory. Both sides’ actions have [increased](#) the death toll to more than 230, with the breakdown showing the [imbalanced](#) nature of Israel’s response: At least 227 Palestinians have been killed compared to 12 killed in Israel.

Though Israel was responding to aggressive missile attacks from Gaza, the roots of current escalation can be attributed to Tel Aviv, whose police [exercised](#) excessive brutality while dealing with Palestine demonstrators on May 6.

The situation has been furthered exacerbated by the domestic political challenges [facing](#) the ruling establishments of both states. In Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu has failed yet again to coalesce a coalition government and while Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas decided to postpone parliamentary and presidential elections for fear of losing the race to the opposition party. The prospects for a resolution between the two sides look slim.

While the United Nations has [called](#) on both states to deescalate the situation immediately, many countries are taking sides.

In the United States, the former Trump administration [opted](#) for different approach last year by embracing Israeli aspirations for uniting 30 percent of the

West Bank under its rule while allowing Palestine a limited state option – provided Israel recognizes the legitimacy of its political leadership.

New President Joe Biden [wanted](#) to shelve the Trump administration’s proposal for Middle East peace and refocus from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific, but the recent Israel-Palestine escalation has messed up that plan. In response to the escalating violence, Biden [highlighted](#) U.S. support for Israel’s security and “legitimate right to defend itself,” [adding](#) later that he saw no “overreaction” by Israeli forces in Gaza.

Russia and China seem to be pursuing a more neutral stance on the conflict. Moscow is calling on both parties to “de-escalate tensions and peacefully resolve the emerging issues.” China’s [position](#) was in tune with that of Russia, urging all parties to exercise restraint to avoid further casualties. Russia and China are known for sharing a common attitude toward the U.N. as a cornerstone of global political architecture, while [opposing](#) the U.S.-promoted “rules-based international order.”

Moscow and Beijing’s overlapping position on facilitating U.N. leadership in solving global disputes is exemplified by their attempts to bring the Israel-Palestine confrontation to the U.N. Security Council (UNSC). China and Russia continue to jointly promote “two-state system” as the best option for a peace settlement, which has also been [supported](#) by the United Nations.

On May 13, Putin, together with U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, [called](#) for an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict via a “two-state solution,” implying the establishment of Palestine as an independent state alongside Israel. Russia and the U.N. have been [promoting](#) the resumption of talks within the framework of the Middle East Quartet – a format [set up](#) in 2002 comprising the U.N., United States, EU, and Russia, aimed at mediating Middle East peace talks by supporting Palestinian economic development and institution building.

China along with Russia has been [calling](#) on the U.N. to “do more to de-escalate tensions and implement a two-state solution.”

Beijing [voiced](#) resentment on May 13 over U.S. obstruction of the UNSC’s May 12 discussion by refusing to approve a joint statement calling for peaceful resolution through a “two state solution.” Prior to that, Washington also [refrained](#) from adopting a Security Council presidential statement on the Palestine-Israel issue. Another emergency meeting of the UNSC, planned to be held on May 14 was [postponed](#) following U.S. objections – a move that also [irked](#) Beijing. The eventual meeting held on May 16 also brought political deadlock, [prompting](#) [China](#) to lash out at Washington for its “obstruction” of common action.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs [questioned](#) U.S. motives and [reprimanded](#) the country for being “indifferent to the sufferings of the

Palestinians.” It is not the first time that the United States has been at odds with its UNSC peers. On May 7, Washington exchanged barbs with China and Russia, indirectly [blaming](#) them for “flouting” international commitments and “blocking attempts to hold accountable those who violate international law.” Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov hit back by [accusing](#) Washington of attempting to create a closed club of democracies based on ideology, which could only “further exacerbate international tension.”

China has been [supporting](#) Palestine independence and officially opposes Israeli occupation of its territories – even while also developing rigorous economic, trade and [diplomatic](#) relations with Tel Aviv. Its good relationship with both sides motivated Beijing to repeat its 2017 offer of providing intermediary services for Israel-Palestine peace talks. Palestine has already [hailed](#) Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s [offer to play peace broker](#), while Israel has kept silent. That might be explained by either its hunger for revenge – as Netanyahu [pledged](#) to continue fighting – or the country’s pro-U.S. position. The Times of Israel’s recent article [commenting](#) on China’s criticism of Washington’s obstructive behavior at the U.N. Security Council highlighted that the United States is “Israel’s diplomatic shield at the UN.” It does not

seem viable that Israel would accept China’s offer to broker peace talks, since the U.S. would never accept giving up regional influence to Beijing.

On May 19, Biden finally [bowed](#) to growing pressure from Democrats and threw his weight behind a ceasefire, recognizing the need to put an end to the hostility by addressing both sides of the conflict, including abuses committed by long-time ally Israel.

The U.S. president mentioned that Washington would rely on its regional partners for brokering a deal between the two sides, with Egypt and Qatar as the most vocal [proponents](#). Still the exact timelines have not been set yet, which speaks to the fragility of the emerging peace-talks. Now much depends on the United States’ shifting positions and Biden’s personal resolution to end the current escalation. His next moves will give important clues to Washington’s long-term policy in the Middle East, as well as the approach of the new administration to its regional stronghold – Israel.

Danil Bochkov is an expert at the Russian International Affairs Council. He earned his Master of Economics at MGIMO-University under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. He also has a master’s degree in world economy from the University of International Business and Economics (UIBE, Beijing).

EU divisions over Israel-Palestine leave Brussels powerless as conflict worsens

The bloc has long failed to find a common position on the intractable conflict in Middle East.

BY [DAVID M. HERSZENHORN](#) AND [RYM MOMTAZ](#)

17 May 2021

EU foreign affairs ministers on Tuesday will discuss the seemingly urgent question of what their governments and Brussels can do to help end the latest deadly violence between Israel and the Palestinians, which has been raging for more than a week. But top officials, diplomats and experts on the Middle East say the answer has been known for years: nothing.

Josep Borrell, the EU's foreign policy chief, convened the special videoconference of ministers after issuing repeated statements in recent days imploring an end to the rocket fire against Israeli civilians by Hamas, and urging that Israel "act proportionately and avoid civilian casualties."

But EU countries have long been ferociously divided over the Israel-Palestine question, as was clear on Sunday when the EU ambassador to the United Nations, Olof Skoog, [delivered a statement](#) to the Security Council condemning the violence but was prevented from speaking "on behalf of its member states." Hungary, an ally of Israel, blocked the statement.

Borrell, similarly, is often forced to issue statements on the Israel-Palestine conflict without the unanimous endorsement of the 27 member countries, effectively leaving him to speak for himself. Without national capitals on board, the EU is impotent on foreign policy.

The result is that as civilian casualties mount, the EU is once again betwixt and between the combatants. Israel is demanding stronger, unequivocal support from Brussels as a fellow democracy, and condemnation of Hamas, which is already designated in the EU as a terrorist group.

Meanwhile, the Palestinians are accusing the EU of turning a blind eye to violations of international law, and decades of territorial occupation and rights abuses.

In terms of geopolitical influence, it means the EU is nowhere to be found.

"In the European Union, what is difficult is to find a full consensus on Israel," Javier Solana, a former NATO secretary-general and former EU high representative for common foreign and security policy, said in an interview for [POLITICO's EU Confidential podcast](#) that will air Thursday.

"[There] never has been a clear consensus about Israel and particularly when the situation is like this," Solana said. "But we should be able to do something ... for helping the people, which are now suffering."

Borrell, who like Solana is a former foreign minister of Spain, is hoping that Tuesday's videoconference will at least yield consensus on a forceful statement aimed at halting the worst violence in years, and contain its risk of escalation. But other officials and diplomats said the meeting could do little more than put

a greater spotlight on the EU's hopeless discord.

Among the 27 member countries, Belgium, Ireland, Sweden and Luxembourg are among those most critical of Israel. Countries in Eastern Europe, especially Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, are among those in strongest support of Israel, though in recent days the flag of Israel has flown prominently over the HQ of Germany's biggest [governing party](#) and official buildings in Austria and the Czech Republic in a show of support. Greece and Cyprus have also grown closer to Israel in that, they said Macron had given his condolences to "the many Palestinian civilian losses resulting from military operations and ongoing clashes with Israel." Macron also reiterated his "unwavering attachment to Israel's security and its right to defend itself in line with international law," but failed to reiterate his support for the rights of Palestinians, or recall the status of Jerusalem under international law, in line with France's historic position.

'Strong and unequivocal support'

This round of clashes was set off after disputes over attempts by Israeli settlers to forcibly evict Palestinians from a neighborhood in Jerusalem, and heavy-handed Israeli police intervention in the Al-Aqsa mosque. Hamas seized upon these incidents to launch a barrage of rockets at Israeli cities; Israel responded with heavy bombing of the Gaza strip.

Israel's deputy ambassador to the EU, Walid Abu Haya, said in an interview Monday that Brussels needed to step up its support of a democratic ally under terrorist attack.

"What we want from Europe is very strong and unequivocal support," Abu Haya said. "The EU cannot just play the game of trying to balance here. The situation is not balanced. All members have declared Hamas as a terror organization."

recent years, partly because of tensions with Turkey.

France typically seeks to stake out more neutral ground, but President Emmanuel Macron's office has issued statements in recent days that tilted decidedly toward Israel. The Elysée's statements "firmly condemned rocket launching claimed by Hamas and other terrorist groups targeting the Israeli territory," but were vaguer when referencing Israeli bombing.

He said Israel would be monitoring Tuesday's Foreign Affairs Council meeting but that in any event, it would defend itself as long as necessary with or without the EU's backing.

"All efforts should be done now just to stop this terror," he said. "Israel's intentions are very clear. We are not stopping, we are going until we put an end to this attack by Hamas."

While Israel is confident of support from allies such as Germany, it has less faith in Borrell, who has criticized Israel in the past, including in [a statement at the end of April](#) that suggested Israel was obstructing elections from being held in the Palestinian territories. EU officials said Borrell had a "frank" conversation with Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi that included concerns about civilian casualties and a disproportionate military response.

An EU spokesman said at a news conference Monday that Borrell's hope was for ministers to agree on steps to help halt the violence and to move toward a resumption of peace negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians.

But Borrell's social-democrat political family has also been critical of Israel, while demanding an end to the violence.

"We believe that the EU must take its responsibility and facilitate peace and a long-lasting solution, and not only the EU but also

the international community should speak out and put an end to the Israeli occupation and work for a two-state solution,” Utta Tuttlies, spokeswoman for the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats group in the European Parliament, said at a news conference.

But Tuttlies also noted the EU’s difficulties in finding a unified position. “We call on the EU and the international community to assume their responsibility and also on the EU to speak up with one voice to stop the violence,” she said.

French hopes

In the podcast interview, Solana said the EU had to find a way to get beyond bland statements and that calls for negotiations between the two sides were unrealistic at the moment. He said Tuesday’s meeting of foreign ministers should at least try to achieve “some mobilization” on the humanitarian front, to alleviate the suffering of those most affected by the conflict.

But many diplomats, officials and experts said the EU’s best chance for influence in the Middle East was more likely to come from France, which after Brexit is the EU’s only permanent member of the U.N. Security Council.

On Monday, Macron met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Paris.

France doesn’t have diplomatic relations with Hamas, and has been backing Egyptian mediation between Hamas and Israel. But no timeline for an end to hostilities has emerged, and there have been no calls for an “immediate ceasefire” or plans for a more limited humanitarian lull, mainly because Israel is not ready to stop military operations yet.

Instead, both presidents “agreed to continue coordinating to foster a quick ceasefire.”

On Thursday, Macron spoke to Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, who has no leverage over Hamas or East Jerusalem. But in a sign of France and Europe’s second-tier role in the conflict, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu “was not available for a phone call that day,” according to Macron’s office. The two spoke on Friday. Netanyahu found the time to speak to U.S. President Joe Biden on Wednesday.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian has been engaged in intense diplomacy, discussing the situation with his American, Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian and Egyptian counterparts.

In a statement on May 10, the spokesperson of the foreign ministry said “France is vividly concerned by threats of forcible evictions targeting residents of the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem, which are part of the settlements policy that is illegal according to international law,” and reiterated France’s “attachment to the preservation of the historic status quo at the Al Aqsa Mosque compound.”

At Monday’s news conference, Peter Stano, a spokesman for the European Commission, said the EU regarded Israeli settlements in the occupied territories as illegal and that Brussels had also urged reconsideration and restraint in regard to threatened evictions.

Stano said the main goal, though, was to end the military conflict.

“The representatives of the European public, the ministers of foreign affairs in this case, are trying very hard to deal with the situation and find the best possible contribution by the EU to de-escalate and stop the violence,” he said. “And I think that’s it. I can only repeat that of course the casualties are unacceptable.”

Explained: How has India's policy on Israel and Palestine evolved over time?

India's statement at UNSC seeks a balance between its old ties with Palestine and growing relations with Israel. Tracing India's journey through the world's oldest conflict, from Nehru years to Modi regime.
by **Nirupama Subramanian** | Mumbai | 2 June 2021

On Monday, India's permanent representative to the United Nations, T S Tirumurti, made a carefully crafted statement at the UN Security Council "open debate" on the escalating **Israel-Palestine violence**, striving to maintain balance between India's historic ties with Palestine and its blossoming relations with Israel.

The statement, the first India has made on the issue, appears to implicitly hold Israel responsible for triggering the current cycle of violence by locating its beginnings in East Jerusalem rather than from Gaza. The request that both sides refrain from "attempts to unilaterally change the existing status quo including in East Jerusalem and its neighbourhoods" seems to be a message to Israel about its settler policy.

The statement was also emphatic that "the historic status quo at the holy places of Jerusalem including the Haram al Sharif/Temple Mount must be respected". The site, administered by Jordan, is revered in both Islam and Judaism. Jewish worshippers are not allowed inside, but have often tried to enter forcibly.

The balancing was evident in the pointed condemnation of the "indiscriminate rocket firings from Gaza" on civilian targets in Israel, but not of the Israeli strikes inside Gaza; the customary omission since 2017 of any reference to East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian

state; and the hyphenation of "Haram Al Sharif/Temple Mount", equating claims of both Israel and Palestine.

India's policy on the longest running conflict in the world has gone from being unequivocally pro-Palestine for the first four decades, to a tense balancing act with its three-decade-old friendly ties with Israel. In recent years, India's position has also been perceived as pro-Israel.

From Nehru to Rao

The balancing began with India's decision to normalise ties with Israel in 1992, which came against the backdrop of the break-up of the Soviet Union, and massive shifts in the geopolitics of West Asia on account of the first Gulf War in 1990. That year, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) lost much of its clout in the Arab world by siding with Iraq and Saddam Hussein in the occupation of Kuwait.

The opening of an Indian embassy in Tel Aviv in January 1992 marked an end to four decades of giving Israel the cold shoulder, as India's recognition of Israel in 1950 had been minus full diplomatic ties.

PM Jawaharlal Nehru's reasoning for the decision to recognise Israel was that it was "an established fact", and that not doing so would create rancour between two UN members. But for long, all there was to show for the bilateral relationship was a consulate in Mumbai, established in 1953, mainly for issuing visas to

the Indian Jewish community, and to Christian pilgrims. This too shut down in 1982, when India expelled the Consul General for criticising India's foreign policy in a newspaper interview. It was permitted to reopen only six years later.

In 1948, India was the only non-Arab-state among 13 countries that voted against the UN partition plan of Palestine in the General Assembly that led to the creation of Israel. Scholars ascribe various reasons for this India's own Partition along religious lines; as a new nation that had just thrown off its colonial yoke; solidarity with the Palestinian people who would be dispossessed; and to ward off Pakistan's plan to isolate India over Kashmir. Later, India's energy dependence on the Arab countries also became a factor, as did the sentiments of India's own Muslim citizens.



Yasser Arafat was received as head of state whenever he visited India. (Express Archive)

India and PLO

The relationship with Palestine was almost an article of faith in Indian foreign policy for over four decades. At the 53rd UN session, India co-sponsored the draft resolution on the right of the Palestinians to self-determination. In the 1967 and 1973 wars, India lashed out at Israel as the aggressor. In the 1970s, India rallied behind the PLO and its leader Yasser Arafat as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

In 1975, India became the first non-Arab country to recognise the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, and invited it to open an office in Delhi, which was accorded diplomatic status five years later. In

1988, when the PLO declared an independent state of Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem, India granted recognition immediately. Arafat was received as head of state whenever he visited India.

Four years after the Narasimha Rao government established a diplomatic mission in Tel Aviv, India opened a Representative Office in Gaza, which later moved to Ramallah as the Palestinian movement split between the Hamas (which gained control of Gaza) and the PLO. New Delhi remained firmly on the side of the PLO, which was seen as ready for a political solution, and had accepted the two-state solution.

India voted in favour of the UN General Assembly resolution in October 2003 against Israel's construction of a separation wall. It voted for Palestine to become a full member of UNESCO in 2011, and a year later, co-sponsored the UN General Assembly resolution that enabled Palestine to become a "non-member" observer state at the UN without voting rights. India also supported the installation of the Palestinian flag on the UN premises in September 2015.

Changes after 2014

For two-and-a-half decades from 1992, the India-Israel relationship continued to grow, mostly through defence deals, and in sectors such as science and technology and agriculture. But India never acknowledged the relationship fully.

There were few high-profile visits, and they all took place when the [BJP](#)-led NDA-1 under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was in office. Israel is Hindutva's ideal of a "strong state" that deals "firmly" with "terrorists". Even back in the 1970s, the BJP's forerunner Jana Sangh had made the case for ties with Israel.

In 2000, L K Advani became the first Indian minister to visit Israel, and in the same year Jaswant Singh visited as Foreign Minister. That year, the two countries set up a joint anti-terror commission. And in 2003, Ariel Sharon became the first Israeli Prime Minister to visit India.

During the UPA's 10 years in office, the balancing act intensified, and Mahmoud Abbas, head of the Palestinian Authority that administers the West Bank, visited in 2005, 2008, 2010 and 2012.

It was during NDA-2 that the government under Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) decided to take full ownership of the relationship with Israel. The first indication of the new phase came with an abstention by India at the UN Human Rights Council on a resolution welcoming a report by the HRC High Commissioner. The report said it had evidence of alleged war crimes committed by Israeli forces and Hamas during the 2014 airstrikes against Gaza that killed over 2000.

The abstention was conspicuous because in 2014, India had voted for the resolution through which the UNHRC inquiry was set up. In 2016, India abstained again at on a UNHRC resolution against Israel. But the big change was the status of the historic city that both Israel and Palestine claim.

East Jerusalem

A visit by PLO chief Mahmoud Abbas in 2017 became the occasion for New Delhi to signal the substantive shift. Until then, in various statements, with its expression of support for a two-state solution, India had always included a line in support of East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state.

The reference to East Jerusalem went missing in Modi's statement during Abbas's visit. Pranab Mukherjee, who in 2015 became the first Indian President to visit Israel, with a first stop at Ramallah, had also reiterated India's position on the city as the capital of an independent Palestine.

In February 2018, Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel. His itinerary did not include Ramallah. The word then was that India had "de-hyphenated" the Israel-Palestine relationship, and would deal with each

separately. Meanwhile, India continues to improve ties with Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and feels vindicated by the decision of some Arab states to improve ties with Israel.

Balancing act

In fact, the de-hyphenation is actually a careful balancing act, with India shifting from one side to another as the situation demands. For instance, even as it abstained at UNESCO in December 2017, India voted in favour of a resolution in the General Assembly opposing the Trump administration's recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital.

At the UNHRC's 46th session in Geneva earlier this year, India voted against Israel in three resolutions – one on the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people, a second on Israeli settlement policy, and a third on the human rights situation in the Golan Heights. It abstained on a fourth, which asked for an UNHRC report on the human right situation in Palestine, including East Jerusalem.

In February, the International Criminal Court claimed jurisdiction to investigate human rights abuses in Palestinian territory including West Bank and Gaza and named both Israeli security forces and Hamas as perpetrators. Prime Minister Netanyahu wanted India, which does not recognise the ICC, to take a stand against it on the issue, and was surprised when it was not forthcoming.

That is because India's own balancing act is a constant work of progress. The latest statement is no different. Though it was not pro Palestine, it hardly pleased Israel. Netanyahu tweeted his thanks to all countries that "resolutely" stood by Israel and "its right to self defense against terrorist attacks", by posting all their flags. The Tricolour was not among them.

Mexico News Daily

Israel summons ambassador after Mexico votes for Palestinian resolution at UN Diplomat was told that Mexico should 'stand by Israel's side'

1 June 2021

Israel's Foreign Ministry summoned the Mexican ambassador this week to explain Mexico's vote in favor of a United Nations investigation into alleged violations of international humanitarian law during last month's intense fighting in the Middle East.

The United Nations Human Rights Council voted last Thursday in favor of

establishing an international commission of inquiry into violations during fighting between Israel and Palestinians in Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Mexico was one of 24 countries that voted in favor of an investigation. Nine countries opposed the move while 14 abstained.



UNITED STATES
INSTITUTE OF PEACE
Making Peace Possible

10 Things to Know: Biden's Approach to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Will the administration's emerging policy be enough to advance peace in this enduring conflict?

10 June 2021 / BY Ambassador Hesham Youssef

Coming into office, the Biden administration was clear that the Middle East would largely take a backseat in its foreign policy agenda. But recent [developments in Jerusalem and the 11-day war on Gaza](#) forced the Israeli-Palestinian conflict back into the forefront of international

attention and revealed elements of the administration’s approach to the conflict. U.S. policy on the conflict has long been a point of bipartisan harmony, with more consensus than contention. The Biden administration’s emerging policy largely aligns with past administrations’ policies, with a few notable differences. But can this approach advance peace amid this protracted conflict?



Secretary of State Antony Blinken, left, joins President Joe Biden and other administration officials in a meeting at the White House on the latest round of violence between the Israelis and Palestinians, May 21, 2021. (Stefani Reynolds/The New York Times)

What We Know About the Administration’s Approach

1. The Biden administration has not prioritized the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on its foreign policy agenda.

At the outset of the administration’s tenure, the [Iranian nuclear file](#) and the war on [Yemen](#) were the only prioritized issues in the Middle East. For decades, however, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had been at the forefront of U.S. policy in the region. President Obama [appointed George Mitchell](#) as his Middle East special envoy within 48 hours of his inauguration, signaling his intention to prioritize the conflict early on. In contrast, President Clinton presented his [parameters](#) for a permanent status agreement to resolve the conflict in the final weeks of his term. President Trump, who spoke early on in his term of

forging “the deal of the century,” moved [the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem](#); reversed previous U.S. positions on [settlements](#) and the [Golan Heights](#); presented a detailed [plan](#) for resolving the conflict; and invested significant political capital in establishing and [advancing Israeli relations with countries in the region and beyond](#).

2. The Biden administration has until now avoided detailed prescriptions, confining policy articulation to its broadly framed end-game vision.

President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken have indicated on numerous occasions that [the two-state solution](#) is the only way to resolve the conflict. However, the administration has not yet gone into any detail regarding such core issues as Jerusalem, final borders, refugees and security. By contrast, the prior administration outlined a [detailed framework](#) for resolving the conflict, much as was done — though starkly [different](#) in vision from the Trump plan — during the Obama, George W. Bush and Clinton administrations. This plan was considered a non-starter for the Palestinians given what was more widely recognized as its heavy [bias](#) toward Israel’s positions. We may yet see a more concrete set of prescriptions emerge or rearticulated. For now, the administration seems focused on resetting the destination.

While the Trump plan ultimately nodded to a [two-state framing](#), it [strayed far from the concept](#) as long-accepted by the international community. By contrast, while refraining from offering details, the Biden administration is nodding toward a more traditional understanding of two states through their insistence on constant use of the term and signals on [Jerusalem](#).

3. The Biden administration seeks active engagement with the Palestinians to advance progress toward conflict resolution.

The administration is looking to reset the relationship with the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah after the prior administration closed the [U.S. consulate in Jerusalem](#) — the longstanding U.S. mission to the Palestinians —

and [halted almost all assistance](#) provided to the Palestinian people. Harkening back to the era of U.S.-Palestinian engagement ushered in with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994, the Biden administration has [partially resumed assistance](#) and during his trip to the region, Blinken asked Israel to allow the [United States to reopen the consulate](#). The administration has also been forthcoming on the reconstruction of Gaza, on the condition that it does not benefit [Hamas](#).

4. The Biden administration exerted pressure on Israel to end the war on Gaza.

Soon after the cease-fire in Gaza was announced, Biden said that he spoke to Prime Minister Netanyahu [six times](#) in a few days. This approach was lower profile than the 2012 and 2014 U.S. engagement when the Obama administration sent Secretaries of State Clinton and Kerry, respectively, to the region to try to bring about a cease-fire.

However, [reports](#) indicated that Washington's patience was running thin and that the last few calls were characterized by firm and clear warnings to Netanyahu. This marks a reversal from the Trump administration's approach of maximum latitude to Israel. Indeed, former U.S. ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, recently [said](#) that a "Trump administration would have given Israel free reign to defend itself."

5. The Biden administration is sending clear messages that Jerusalem is still on the table.

During Blinken's visit to Israel, he announced that the consulate they seek to reopen would be in Jerusalem. He also warned Israeli leaders that such steps as evicting Palestinian families from East Jerusalem could "undermine even further the difficult prospect of two states," and "spark renewed tension, conflict and war." While refraining from specification of Jerusalem's final status, the message is a clear back track from the Trump plan that stipulated that "Jerusalem will remain the sovereign capital of the State of Israel, and it should remain an undivided city."

6. The Biden administration views Israelis and Palestinians alike as parties with rights and interests.

Biden and members of his administration have repeatedly [said](#) that the United States believes that Palestinians and Israelis "deserve equal measures of security, freedom, opportunity and dignity." This parity is a departure from the approach of the prior administration, in which senior officials described numerous issues recognized by the international community as Palestinian *rights* as [only aspirations](#).

7. The Biden administration considers settlement activity and annexation unilateral actions that undermine the prospect of a two-state solution.

Blinken [said](#) that the United States opposes any steps by either side that "either risk sparking violence or ... ultimately undermine the prospect for returning to the pursuit of two states." He listed settlement activity among such steps, alongside home demolitions, evictions, incitement to violence and payment to terrorists. The framing carries echoes of many prior U.S. administration public statements that have [refrained](#) from referring to settlements as illegal, in favor of phrases such as "obstacle to peace," or "ill-advised." It departs from the Trump administration, under whose plan not a single settlement was to be dismantled and Israel would have been allowed to extend its sovereignty over all Israeli settlements. While generally avoiding definitive policy pronouncements related to the conflict, in recent days Biden reportedly outright [rejected](#) support for any future plans by Israel to annex West Bank territory. Under the Trump plan, Israel would have been allowed to annex 30 percent of the West Bank to incorporate settlements and the Jordan Valley. The Biden administration has been firm on the need to protect Israel's security, but has been silent on the role of the Jordan Valley in that equation, even as it has [nodded](#) to the security value of the Golan Heights — an area that the Trump administration recognized as part of Israel.

8. The Biden administration does not believe that Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are possible now.

Blinken divided the administration's next steps on the conflict into three clear sequential [phases](#) that would be a precursor to any efforts to bring the parties back to the negotiating table:

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 the prior steps, over time, to improve people's lives and add a sense of dignity and hope.

Blinken added his aspiration that these steps might produce a better environment in which a resumed effort to achieve a two-state solution could take place. This reflects a more gradual approach than taken by the prior two administrations in which we saw robust efforts via special envoys and final status negotiations in the case of Obama, and a plan around which negotiations were expected by Trump.

9. The Biden administration seeks engagement with other stakeholders.

The Biden administration indicated that it will be cooperating with other stakeholders on a range of global issues, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite questions pertaining to the [effectiveness](#) of the Middle East Quartet

(United States, Russia, the EU and the U.N.), this multilateral body, first convened under the George W. Bush administration, has resumed meeting after a period of dormancy driven by the Trump administration's preference to work on this issue unilaterally. Moreover, Blinken [said](#) that the United States will work with its partners to address the urgent needs in Gaza, and to address some of the underlying causes that could spark another cycle of violence.

10. The Biden administration supports normalization deals between Israel and Arab countries but is not prioritizing pushing more forward.

The Biden administration has announced its support for the normalization agreements signed under the Trump administration and has expressed its hope that they can contribute to achieving Israeli-Palestinian peace. Pursuit of regional agreements has been a component of U.S. diplomacy on this conflict dating back to the Madrid process under President George H. W. Bush and immediately prior to the Trump administration was pursued by [Secretary Kerry](#) in 2016. However, it seems the Biden administration considers addressing the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian friction as more deserving of its current attention than avid pursuit of additional Arab-Israeli agreements. The Trump administration seemingly viewed the agreements as a tool to pressure Palestinians to accept its vision of a final settlement.