

Violence in Israel and Palestine

June 10, 2021

The Israel-Palestine conflict – often referred to as the ‘world’s most intractable conflict’ – is rooted in a dispute over land claimed by Jews as their biblical birthright and by the Palestinians, who seek self-determination. Despite repeated attempts to end the conflict between the two countries, there is no peace settlement in sight. The issue gained prominence again due to the recent rocket strikes by Hamas on Israeli territories and the Israeli retaliation targeting the Gaza strip.

In news: Deadly Gaza violence between Israel and Palestine

Placing it in syllabus: Foreign Affairs

Dimensions

- Reasons of conflict
- Brief history of the problem
- Arguments from both sides
- Solution : Proposed by UN
- India’s take on it

Content:

Reasons of Conflict:

- The renewed violence in the region started on May 6, 2021 when Palestinians protested against an anticipated decision of the Israeli Supreme Court over the eviction of six Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah in occupied East Jerusalem.
- The next day, Israeli Police stormed the Al Aqsa mosque.
- A few days later, Hamas and other Palestinian groups started firing rockets from Gaza into Israel to which

Israel retaliated.

- It is the heaviest fighting between the two bitter enemies since 2014 and isn't showing any signs of slowing.
- An emergency meeting of the UNSC has been conducted for drawing out an immediate plan of de-escalation and restoration of peace in the region.

Brief history of the problem:

- The Israel-Palestine conflict is one of the world's longest-running and most controversial conflicts.
- It is a conflict between two self-determination movements – the Jewish nationalist project and the Palestinian nationalist project, in the same territory.

To understand the present-day ongoing bloody conflict between Israel and Palestine, it is necessary to understand the background of the place and the people associated with it.

- In 1897, Jews started a movement called a **Zionist movement**, to escape persecution and establish their own state in their ancestral homeland, Israel. The World Zionist Organisation was created to **advocate for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine**.
- As a result, a large number of Jews started flowing into Palestine and they bought land and started settling down there.
- By 1916, Palestine came under British control after the **Sykes-Picot Agreement** (a secret agreement between Great Britain and France). This led to the division of the old Ottoman Turkish Empire.
- The seeds of the conflict were laid in **1917** when the then **British Foreign Secretary** Arthur James Balfour **expressed official support of Britain for a Jewish "national home"** in Palestine under **the Balfour Declaration**. The lack of concern for the "rights of existing non-Jewish communities" i.e. the Arabs led to

prolonged violence.

- Unable to contain Arab and Jewish violence, **Britain withdrew its forces from Palestine in 1948**, leaving responsibility for resolving the competing claims to the newly created United Nations.
- The UN presented a partition plan to create independent Jewish and Arab states in Palestine. Most Jews in Palestine accepted the partition but most Arabs did not.
- In **1948**, the Jewish declaration of Israel's independence prompted surrounding Arab states to attack. At the end of the war, Israel controlled about 50 percent more territory than originally envisioned by the UN partition plan. Jordan controlled the West Bank and Jerusalem's holy sites, and Egypt controlled the Gaza Strip.
- **1964**: Founding of the **Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)**
- **1967**: In **Six-day Arab- Israeli war**, Israeli forces seize the Golan Heights from Syria, the West Bank & East Jerusalem from Jordan and Sinai Peninsula & Gaza strip from Egypt.
- The 1967 war is particularly important for today's conflict, as it left Israel in control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, two territories home to a large number of Palestinians.
- Gaza and Westbank are together known as '**Occupied Territories**', after the 1967 war.
- **1975**: **The United Nations granted the PLO observer status and recognized Palestinians' right to self-determination.**
- **Camp David Accords (1978)**: "Framework for Peace in the Middle East" brokered by U.S. set the stage for peace talks between Israel and its neighbors and a resolution to the "Palestinian problem". This however remained unfulfilled.
- **1981**: **Israel effectively annexes the Golan** but this is not recognized by the United States or the international community.

- **1987: Founding of Hamas**, a violent offshoot of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood seeking "to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine" through violent jihad.
- **1987:** Tensions in the occupied territories of West Bank and Gaza reached boiling point resulting in the First Intifada (Palestinian Uprising). It grew into a small war between Palestinian militants and the Israeli army.
- **1988:** Jordan cedes to the PLO all the country's territorial claims in the West Bank and Eastern Jerusalem.
- **1993:** Under the **Oslo Accords**, Israel and the PLO agree to officially recognize each other and renounce the use of violence. The Oslo Accords also established the Palestinian Authority, which received limited autonomy in the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.
- **2005: Israel begins a unilateral withdrawal of Jews from settlements in Gaza.** However, Israel kept tight control over all border crossings (blockade).
- **2006: Hamas scores a victory in Palestinian Authority elections.** The vote leaves the Palestinian house divided between Fatah movement, represented by President Mahmoud Abbas, and Hamas, which will control the cabinet and parliament. Efforts at cohabitation fail almost immediately.
- **2007: Palestinian Movement Splits** after few months of formation of a joint Fatah-Hamas government. Hamas militants drive Fatah from Gaza. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas appoints a new government in Ramallah (West Bank), which is quickly recognized by the United States and European Union. Gaza remains under Hamas control.
- **2012:** UN upgrades Palestinian representation to that of "non-member observer state".
- **2014:** Israel responds to the kidnapping and murder of three Jewish teenagers in the West Bank by arresting numerous Hamas members. Militants respond by firing rockets from Gaza. Clashes end in an uneasy, Egyptian-

brokered ceasefire.

- **2014: Fatah and Hamas form a unity government**, though distrust remains between the two factions.



Important Regions:

West Bank:

- The West Bank is sandwiched between Israel and Jordan.
- One of its major cities is **Ramallah, the de facto administrative capital of Palestine**.
- Israel took control of it in the 1967 war and has over the years established settlements there.

Gaza:

- The Gaza Strip is located between Israel and Egypt.
- Israel occupied the strip after 1967, but relinquished control of Gaza City and day-to-day administration in most of the territory during the Oslo peace process.
- In 2005, Israel unilaterally removed Jewish settlements from the territory, though it continues to control international access to it.

Golan Heights:

- The Golan Heights is a strategic **plateau** that Israel **captured from Syria** in the 1967 war.
- Israel effectively annexed the territory in 1981.

- Recently, the USA has officially recognized Jerusalem and Golan Heights as a part of Israel.

Arguments from both sides:

- Despite a long-term peace process, Israelis and Palestinians have failed to reach a final peace agreement.

Palestinian Demands:

- Palestine wants Israeli to halt all expansionary activities and retreat to pre-1967 borders.
- It wants to establish a sovereign Palestine state in the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as its capital.
- Palestine wants Palestine refugees who lost their homes in 1948 be able to come back.
- Large numbers of Palestinians who fled their homes in what is now Israel, during the preceding wars as well as their descendants believe they deserve the right to return but Israel is against it.
- The Palestinian leadership is divided – two-state solution is supported by Palestinian nationalists in West Bank but the leadership in Gaza does not even recognize Israel.

Israeli Demands:

- Israel wants it to be recognised as a Jewish state with complete sovereignty over Jerusalem.
- It wants the Palestine refugees to return only to Palestine, not to Israel.
- Further, while successive Israeli Prime Ministers – Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert and Benjamin Netanyahu – have all accepted the idea of a Palestinian state, they have differed in terms of what it should actually comprise.

Solution Proposed by UN:

Two-State Solution:

- The “two state solution” is based on a UN resolution of 1947 which proposed two states – one would be a state where Zionist Jews constituted a majority, the other where the Palestinian Arabs would be a majority of the population.
- It would create a sovereign Israel and Palestine. It would establish Palestine as an independent state in Gaza and most of the West Bank, leaving the rest of the land to Israel.
- It would identify a 1967 demarcation line known as the Green Line to partition Palestinian and Israeli land. It would also divide Jerusalem between the two states.
- The idea was however rejected by the Arabs.
- For decades, it has been held by the international community as the only realistic deal to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- In 1993 the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) agreed on a plan to implement a two-state solution as part of the Oslo Accords, leading to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Israel Palestine Peace process:

Camp David Accords:

- They were brokered by the U.S. in 1978. It set the stage for peace talks between Israel and its neighbors and a resolution to the “Palestinian problem”.
- However, no concrete results were obtained.

Oslo Accords:

- They were also mediated by the U.S in 1993. Under this, Israel and the PLO agreed to officially recognize each

other and renounce the use of violence.

- It would create a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank, in exchange for an agreement by Palestinians to end any type of attack on Israel.
- They gave limited autonomy in the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank to the Palestinian authority.
- However, both states are yet to agree on the provisions of the Oslo accords.

India's take on it:

- India has been consistently supportive of the Palestinian cause.
- India was one of the few countries to oppose the UN's partition plan in November 1947, echoing its own experience during independence a few months earlier.
- In the decades that followed, the Indian political leadership actively supported the Palestinian cause and withheld full diplomatic relations with Israel.
- India recognised Israel in 1950 but it is also the first non-Arab country to recognise Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) as the sole representative of the Palestinian.
- India is also one of the first countries to recognise the statehood of Palestine in 1988.
- In 1996, India opened its Representative Office to the Palestine Authority in Gaza, which was later shifted to Ramallah (West Bank) in 2003.
- Currently, **India supports a two-state solution** to the Israeli-Palestinian issue.
- **On May 27, 2021, India abstained from voting in the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on a resolution for investigation into the recent Gaza violence**, proposing to setting up a commission of inquiry to look into the violations during the recent violence in Gaza as well as the "systematic" abuses in Palestinian territories and those inside Israel.

- As a part of the **Link West Policy**, India has de-hyphenated its relationship with Israel and Palestine in 2018. This will allow it to **treat both the countries as mutually independent and exclusive.**
- As per India, the issues between the two should be **resolved through direct negotiations and solutions must be acceptable to both.**

Mould your thought: Discuss the historical and the current reasons behind the Israel -Palestine Conflict. What has been India's response to this issue?***Approach to the answer:***

- Introduction
- Discuss the historical reasons for the conflict in brief
- Discuss the reasons for the recent violence
- Discuss India's stand on the issue
- Conclusion