



THE POLITICS BEHIND ISRAEL'S LATEST CONFRONTATIONS WITH PALESTINE

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Palestinians are still counting their dead as Israel continues its crimes of apartheid in the occupied territories. The conflict still continues as the problem that led to the recent crisis has not gone away. There is a political crisis in Palestinian Authority (PA) and war is an extension of politics. The recent cycle of violence began at the end of April, when Palestinian people, protesting against the illegal verdict by Israeli Supreme court that led to forced expulsion of Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah (a neighborhood of East Jerusalem), were met with rubber-coated bullets, and stun grenades by Israeli police.¹ Violence escalated in the holy month of Ramadan when Israeli forces raided the Al-Aqsa mosque on May 7, where Palestinian Muslims were gathered for prayers. On the revered night of Laylat al-Qadr, Israeli forces stormed Al-Aqsa mosque and attacked Muslim worshipers by firing rubber-coated bullets, tear gas and sound bombs. More than a hundred Palestinians were injured, including minors.

Civil unrest continues to spawn across West Bank and Gaza as Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu vows to continue airstrikes against Palestinians. Even though, Israel asserts that it is targeting Hamas and not civilians, almost 1,235 Palestinians have been injured and more than 250 Palestinians have died

¹ "What Led to the Most Recent Israel-Palestine Escalation?," www.aljazeera.com, May 12, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/12/what-lead-up-to-most-recent-israel-palestine-escalation>.

including 66 children and 39 women in Gaza alone.² The United Nations called for an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Palestine since the violence was escalating towards a full scale-war.³ However, even after the May 21 ceasefire, clashes broke out in East Jerusalem.

The current crisis is multi-faceted as Israel has not only launched full-scale military action against Palestinians but has also derailed any chance of democracy in Palestine. Israel aims to continue extreme brutality as it seeks total destruction of Palestine in order to ensure its own survival. 'Normality is only a mirage until the next conflict' according to Philippe Lazzarini, the commissioner-general of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).⁴

Over the years, it can be seen that in order to continue its annexation, Israel not only induces violent conflicts but also wrecks Palestinian efforts for peace. On 15 January, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas issued a decree announcing that parliamentary and presidential elections would be conducted in May and July 2021, in West Bank and Gaza respectively. These elections were to be held for the first time after 15 years. Critics were skeptical about the benefits of the upcoming elections for the people of Palestine as Israel is the occupier and the Palestinian Authority (PA) is not an independent entity. The Palestinian election commission also approved the participation of 36 candidates in legislative elections which were to be held in May. The new Biden administration and European Union were also trying to make this electoral process a success as they aim to revamp prospects for a peace agreement between Israel and Palestine.⁵ However, the issue of democratic deficit in Palestine has not been resolved primarily because the legislation has been dysfunctional for more than a decade. Political activism has been limited due to the tight grip on power. The PA has only conducted elections twice in the past- the results of which were also not agreed upon between both the rival parties, Fatah and Hamas. Despite these past confrontations, the voter enthusiasm was overwhelming for the upcoming elections, thus showcasing how the people of Palestine were pinning their hopes on democracy.

² "Gaza Death Toll in Israeli Attacks Rises to 248, Including 66 Children," Anadolu Ajansı, May 22, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/gaza-death-toll-in-israeli-attacks-rises-to-248-including-66-children/2250630#:~:text=The%20death%20toll%20from%20the,Health%20Ministry%20said%20on%20Fri day.>

³ Sam Meredith, "Fighting between Israel and Palestinians Escalating toward a Full-Scale War, UN Warns," CNBC, May 12, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/05/12/gaza-un-warns-of-full-scale-war-between-israel-and-palestinians.html>.

⁴ Al Jazeera, "Root Causes of Israel-Palestine Conflict Must Be Addressed: UNRWA," Gaza News | Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera, May 24, 2021), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/24/root-causes-of-israel-palestine-conflict-must-be-addressed-unrwa>.

⁵ Hugh Lovatt, "Back to Democracy: Europe, Hamas, and the Palestinian Elections – European Council on Foreign Relations," ECFR, March 18, 2021, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/back-to-democracy-europe-hamas-and-the-palestinian-elections/>.

Unfortunately, this time as well, their hopes were short-lived as elections have been postponed primarily because Israel did not allow the carrying out of free elections in East Jerusalem.⁶ PA formally requested Israel to allow Palestinians in East Jerusalem to vote as the region is under Israeli occupation since the 1967 war.⁷ At the same time, the EU was also pressing Israel to allow free elections to take place in East Jerusalem. However, the demands were rejected by Israel. Israel was also reluctant to allow these elections as it is of the view that Hamas, a party that seeks to destroy Israel, should not be seen as eligible for elections. Hamas is an Islamic resistance movement supporting the liberation of Palestine; it has been using its domestic strength to engage with the regional actors and the broader international community. Despite being labeled as a terrorist organization by the US and Israel, Hamas has established links within the USA, Europe, Russia, South Africa, and Malaysia.⁸ On the contrary, Fatah is a secular party that believes in negotiations rather than armed resistance. Fatah also recognizes Israel, unlike Hamas, but both rival parties aim to build a state on the 1967 borders.

If we look back into history, it was Israel in the early 1980s that created Hamas by supporting Palestinian Islamist outfits as a counterweight to the secular party-Fatah and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) led by Yasser Arafat.⁹ Today Israel is targeting the Palestinian population as part of its mission to target Hamas. From derailing democracy in Palestine in the name of Hamas to killing hundreds of Palestinians, Israel continues to illegally annex Palestinian land. On the other hand, Hamas is gaining much dominance in Gaza as compared to Fatah party as Hamas has been actively retaliating against Israeli forces.

The current crisis is exposing the immense level of hard as well as soft power Israel possesses today. Here it can also be asserted that the disproportionate power division between Israel and Palestine allows Israel to assert its power in the political and security realm of the Israeli-occupied Palestinian land. The iron dome missile shield of Israel has intercepted 90% of Hamas rockets that were fired in response to Israeli brutality. Hundreds of Palestinians have been illegally evicted from their own homes as per the court orders of the Israeli Supreme Court. Moreover, Israel is also using social media to silence Palestinians as Israeli brutality has been gaining attention of the international community. Israel and its allies are approaching big tech companies like Facebook to remove

⁶ "Palestinian Elections: Abbas Postpones Rare Polls," *BBC News*, April 29, 2021, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56929547>.

⁷ "Palestinians Take Another Step in Preparations for First Election in 15 Years," *Al Arabiya English*, March 20, 2021, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2021/03/20/Palestinians-take-another-step-in-preparations-for-first-election-in-15-years>.

⁸ Daud Abdullah, *Engaging the World: The Making of Hamas's Foreign Policy* (Johannesburg: Afro-Middle East Centre (Amec), 2021).

⁹ Mehdi Hasan, "Blowback: How Israel Went from Helping Create Hamas to Bombing It," *The Intercept*, 2019, <https://theintercept.com/2018/02/19/hamas-israel-palestine-conflict/>.

content that goes in the favor of Palestinians or represents the Palestinian perspective.¹⁰ These latest confrontations are also putting a question mark on the new Biden Administration's human rights policy as public statements from the White House have been more inclined towards Israel's right to self-defense rather than focusing on war crimes such as forced evictions.¹¹

Conclusively, Israel is ably employing its political, military, and economic might to achieve the goal of territorial judaization that is achieving maximum Arab land with minimum Arab population. The creation of a Jewish state in Palestine has been the ultimate territorial goal that Israel has been trying to achieve gradually through politics and violence. Amid the ongoing humanitarian crisis, Palestinians, who are the victims of Israeli brutality, are now looking towards the international community, especially towards Muslim nations, for help. The conflict can only be resolved if the powerful Western states, who claim to endorse two state solution, take a firm stand against illegal settlements by Israeli settlers.

¹⁰ Omar Zahzah, "Digital Apartheid: Palestinians Being Silenced on Social Media," [www.aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/5/13/social-media-companies-are-trying-to-silence-palestinian-voices), May 13, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/5/13/social-media-companies-are-trying-to-silence-palestinian-voices>.

¹¹ "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Gives Biden Foreign Policy Headache," *BBC News*, May 15, 2021, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57119881>.