

Israel Palestine Conflict - India, US calls for calm: RSTV- Big Picture

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Context:

The violent confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli security forces at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem have escalated into armed conflict between Hamas, a Palestinian militant organization based in Gaza, and Israel.

Background:

- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the world's longest-running and most controversial conflicts. It claims to have its roots in 957 BC when King Solomon built the first temple in the Israelite kingdom. The temple was destroyed by Nebuchadrezzar II of Babylon in 587/586 BC.
- Though both the Jews and the Arab Muslims date their claims to the land back a couple of thousand years, the current political conflict began in the early 20th century.
- Tensions are always high between Israel and Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank. Gaza is ruled by a Palestinian militant group called Hamas, which has fought Israel many times. Israel and Egypt tightly control Gaza's borders.
- Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank say they're suffering because of Israeli actions and restrictions. Israel says it is only acting to protect itself from Palestinian violence.
- British rulers failed to establish peace between Muslims and Jews and thus, declared the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.
- Palestinians objected and a war followed. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were forced out of their homes in what they call Al-Nakba, or the "Catastrophe".
- By the time the fighting ended in a ceasefire the following year, Israel controlled most of the territory. The war led to over 700,000 Palestinians becoming refugees.
- Jordan occupied land, which became known as the West Bank, and Egypt occupied Gaza.
- Jerusalem was divided between Israeli forces in the West and Jordanian forces in the East.
- Since there was never a peace agreement, each side blamed the other, and wars and conflicts continued.
- The most significant one among them was fought in 1967 when Israel occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank, as well as most of the Syrian Golan Heights, and Gaza, and the Egyptian Sinai peninsula.

- Today's lines largely reflect the outcomes of two of these wars, one waged in 1948 and another in 1967.

The gravity of the recent conflict:

- Israel has used disproportionate force against Hamas, which is fighting from Gaza.
- The action of Hamas also reflects the growing dissatisfaction with Muhammad Abbas, the moderate Palestinian leader based in Ramallah in the West Bank.
- Abbas has failed to conduct elections in the past 15 years. This has alienated a part of the Palestinian people and hardliners. This has also weakened the cause for a unified Palestine.
- 20% of Israel's population consists of Arab Muslims. The attack on Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest shrine of Muslims has also alienated them and they are sympathizing with the Palestinian cause. Together with political instability in Israel, this may lead to a civil war in Israel.
- The attack on the mosque has also given Islamic militants an opportunity to call for attacks across other parts of the world.

Role of the USA:

- The President of the US, Joe Biden, has stated that Israel has the right to defend itself and has called for ending the conflict as soon as possible.
- In the [United Nations Security Council](#), the US has blocked any discussion on the issue by using its veto power even though 14 out of 15 members called for an urgent meeting on the issue.
- A certain section of the Democratic lawmakers in the US believes that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is responsible for such escalation and has called to put pressure on him to end the conflict.
- However, the US has less leverage because of Donald Trump's action of unilaterally siding with Israel over Jerusalem, which the Palestinians consider as their capital, and the vacillation of Biden over putting pressure on Israel.
- The US is also trying to shift its focus from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific to tackle China.

Role of Regional Powers:

- The Arab nations are also divided. On the one hand, Iran and Turkey are champions of the Palestine cause and on the other hand, Saudi Arabia and UAE have improved their relations with Israel.
- Qatar, Egypt, and Turkey are trying their best to calm the situation.
- Russia is also playing its role, with Hamas and Israel being in constant talks with Russian authorities.
- China is also actively engaged in the situation.

Role of India:

- India has termed the conflict as an internal matter of Israel and Palestine and has called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.
- India now follows **dehyphenation policy** when it comes to Israel and Palestine. It means India's relationship with Israel would stand on its own merits, independent and separate from India's

relationship with the Palestinians. It would no longer be India's relationship with Israel-Palestine, but India's relationship with Israel, and India's relationship with the Palestinians.

- With the West shying away from its responsibilities to solve the Israel-Palestine conflict and the trust deficit with China, Palestinian leader Muhammad Abbas in 2014 had called for India to play the role of interlocutor in resolving the conflict.
- India can be part of the peace process to end this conflict under the overall leadership of the [United Nations](#).

The way forward:

- There is a need for leadership change in both Israel and Palestine. A part of the conflict is also driven by domestic political compulsion. New leadership in both countries will give new hope for the peace process.
- Successful negotiation of the [US-Iran nuclear deal](#) will also help in de-escalating the tensions, given Iran's support to Hamas.

Conclusion:

Looking at the ground situation, the resolution of the Israel Palestine conflict is still elusive. The only way forward is peace talks between the two countries as suggested by India and further negotiations on the two-state solution proposed by the United Nations.