

The Resurgence of Violence in the Question of Palestine: International Powers Support Israel

Edited by: Menna Khaled

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Weeks of turmoil and clashes between the Palestinians and Israelis in Jerusalem have resulted in heightened tensions across East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, with clashes escalating to fighting. Tensions took place during the holy month of Ramadan and proceeded even after the Muslims celebration of Eid al-Fitr. From the 23rd to the 26th of April, 41 rockets were launched from Gaza to Israel, the largest barrage of rockets fired from Palestinians against Israel since 2014. The Israeli defense forces retaliated with air strikes against Hamas positions, resulting in a high number of casualties and deaths of innocent civilians, including women and children.

In light of the past events of escalated tensions and the recent implemented ceasefire between the state of Palestine and Israel, the Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue issues an article entitled as “The Resurgence of Violence in the Question of Palestine and the Rising International Focus”. The report focuses on the western countries responses to the escalated violence that took place on the Palestinian territories. Accordingly, the report focuses to reveal the stances of the European Union, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States as they are Israel’s closest Allies in Western hemisphere. With minimal or almost no differences among the countries responses to the conflict, all the countries along with the European union had a passive approach, aligning with their constant restrained approach in regards to the Palestinian question. The report first provides an overview on the timeline of the outbreak violence that started from the month of April ending in a ceasefire at the end of the month of May. Following the timeline, the report identifies the European Union, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States positions on the conflict. The report concludes that the western powers had limited added value to recent conflict, and have failed to by international law norms and values by turning a blind eye to international law violations conducted by Israel.

The Escalation of Violence

The outbreak of protests and hostilities between Israel, armed groups, and Palestinians is not a new phenomenon; however, the new wave of hostilities brought devastation to the Palestinians and caused many casualties. The rising tension and violence between Gaza and the occupied forces is the worst since 2014, whereby a dozens of innocent civilians have been killed. Following a month of spiraling tensions and conflicts, a ceasefire took place on the 21st of May.

Tensions started to erupt on the 13th of April, the first night of the holy month of Ramadan between the Palestinians and the Israeli police forces in East Jerusalem, inflamed by a series of confrontations with police. The tension was caused by the placed barriers outside the Damascus gate entrance to the Jerusalem’s old city, preventing the Palestinians from gathering after prayers at Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The clashes quickly escalated to rockets being fired from Gaza at Israel, which Israel responded with air strikes. Clashes and assaults started to spread in the port city of Jaffa and in Jerusalem, where nationalist Jews and youth called for “Death to Arabs”. The clashes between the two groups led the police to interfere for separation, leading to injuries of dozens of people.

The conflict continued to escalate as on the 2nd of May, President Abbas' Fatah faction and Hamas condemned the threat of the eviction of the Palestinian families from their households in Sheikh Jarrah district of East Jerusalem by Jewish Settlers ahead of a court hearing. However, on the 6th of May, the Israel court authorized the eviction of six Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood for Jewish families to move into.

In the days that followed, clashes continued to rise, causing deaths of civilians. Militants in Gaza sent incendiary balloons into Israel causing fires. In the last days of Ramadan, major clashes erupted at Al-Aqsa mosque injuring more than 300 people, compounded with Israeli forces firing rubber bullets, water cannon, tear gas, and stun grenades against Palestinians. Tensions remained high during the month of May with more clashes taking place between Israeli police and Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah and at Damascus gate.

The disastrous situation commenced on the 10th of May, when Hamas threatened Israel to withdraw its soldiers from the holy site and Sheikh Jarrah by 6 P.M. The threatening of Hamas to Israel has triggered retaliatory airstrikes, resulting into a non-stoppable exchange of rocket fire and air strikes escalated between the two parties, increasing the hostilities between the two sides since the 2014 war. The firing coincided with the annual Jerusalem Day March planned by hundreds of Israeli nationalists to celebrate Israel capture of East Jerusalem in 1967, which has inflamed Palestinians with anger leading to further break of clashes between police and Palestinians. The atmosphere was volatile with more than 300 Palestinians and some 21 police officers been injured. The vast majority of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces was in Gaza strip, at least 243 people including more than 100 women and children were killed in Gaza in the fighting, with 12 people dead in Israel, according to the health ministry.

After 11 days of fighting and a month of spiraling confrontations and clashes, Israel and Palestine agrees on holding a ceasefire agreement due to international mediation efforts played by Egypt, Jordan, and France.

The Passiveness of the European Union

For decades, the European Union has been an active external actor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the European Union role has been questioned due to the lack of implemented actions against the aggressor. The European Union support to democratic norms, humanitarian, and international law norms, and values are sidelined, only restricted to diplomatic approach rather than economic or political.

The European Union has long remained passive toward the Palestinian -Israeli conflict. The European Union position on the Palestinian Israeli conflict has remained clear, with its support to the two state solution; however, the role of the EU countries in diffusing the current Israeli-Palestinian tension and the volatile situation was very minimal. During the fighting, the EU high ranking diplomat demanded an end to the ongoing violence taking place in Israel and Palestinian territories amid the rocket attacks and airstrikes. On Tuesday, 11th of May amid the pounded airstrikes by Israel against the Palestinians, the EU's high representative Josep Borrell said in an official statement "The grave

escalation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the major upsurge in violence in and around Gaza, must stop," he said in an official statement".

Amid the clashes taking place on the Palestinians occupied territories, the Israeli Jerusalem District Committee announced its decision to approve its plan for building 540 housing units to expand the Har Homa settlement between East Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank. The announcement incited the states of France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom on Israeli Settlements. The Statement by Spokespersons of the Foreign Ministries of these countries urged the Israeli government to reverse the decision saying, "We urge the Government of Israel to reverse its decision....and to cease its policy of settlement expansion across the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Settlements are illegal under international law, and threaten prospects for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We call on both sides to refrain from any unilateral action".

Other European leaders have also raised their concerns at the ongoing conflict. On the escalation of the confrontations, the European council President Charles Michel tweeted on the 12th of May "The grave escalation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the major upsurge in violence in and around Gaza, must stop". The statement was followed by consecutive days of violence and clashes between the two sides. Charles Michel added in his statements "The indiscriminate launching of rockets from Hamas and other groups towards Israeli civilians is unacceptable, while recognizing Israel's legitimate need to protect its civilian population, this response needs to be proportionate and with maximum restraint in the use of force".

However, the EU reiterates its position that settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory to be illegal under international law, and has called the Israeli government to halt settlement construction.

The European Union role in de-escalating the conflict remained as always restrained to diplomatic approach, recognizing the right of Israel's legitimate right to counter the Palestinians, while disregarding the main reasons behind the escalation of the conflict; Israel's aggression, repression of the Palestinians' human rights, and Israel's illegal settlement activities.

The European Union as a block didn't have a tangible impact in addressing the conflict. The statements and officials' rhetoric did not address this flare up and the decades of the historical conflict. Moreover, the European Union head of states have different views, sometimes conflicting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which could be seen in some individual states diversified tones as a reaction to the surging violence.

France's Neutral Approach

The European Union has limited added value when it comes to the conflict as the bloc has long failed to find a common stance on the conflict and to implement decisive and firm actions. Meanwhile, France took a more balanced diplomatic and neutral approach. The French republic denounced the Israeli settlers' actions as illegal while condemning the Palestinians for violating international law. The Foreign Ministry "strongly condemned" rocket fire from the Gaza Strip "in violation of international law" while also denouncing the forced evictions of residents in East Jerusalem as "illegal."

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", says the spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry on the 10th of May.

On the 13th of May, Macron spoke to the Palestinian authority leader as a sign of France second tier role in the conflict; the French Foreign Minister has also engaged diplomatically discussing the situation with the U.S., Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Egypt.

There was high expectations that the European Union's best chance to fortify its grounds and increase its influence in the Middle East was more likely to come from France, as it is the EU's only permanent member of the U.N. security council; however, the expectations came to an end with France adopting neutral grounds and turning the conflict to the U.S.

France wanted to ease the burden from its shoulders, so it emphasized on the need of the U.S. to play a more active role in easing the tension, as it is Israel's closest ally. French Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Clément Beaune, said on French television, "Those who say that it is an Israeli aggression against Palestine or the other way around are wrong". He also added that the U.S. as Israel's closest ally must involve itself more effectively, "It is clear that they are the ones who still have the main diplomatic command, even if Europe must be more present" said Clément Beaune.

France's clear declaration of the U.S. to be the one who have the "main diplomatic command" and the fact that it necessitated U.S. involvement embarks on the restrained approach of the republic toward the conflict.

France's call to the U.S. to have a more active role reflected also on the European Union passive role in mediation between the two parties, aligning with its constant relatively restrained approach. However, France has alternated its passive approach and backed Egypt in its mediation efforts since it has no diplomatic relations with Hamas.

With the continuous escalation of the conflict, France proposed a resolution at the United Nations Security Council in coordination with Egypt and Jordan, calling for ceasefire in the Israel-Gaza conflict on the 19th of May. The resolution was agreed upon after the French president Emmanuel Macron and his Egyptian counterpart agreed on the resolution with video conference with Abdel with Jordan's King Abdullah II. The three countries agreed on three simple elements "the shooting must

stop, the time has come for a ceasefire and the UN Security Council must take up the issue," the Elysee Palace said.

France position on the conflict is very clear; the French republic support the two states solution as the only way to resolve the conflict, but France's neutral diplomatic approach, and the international community's failure to support the establishment of the two states, the conflict will never come to an end. France depends largely on the diplomatic approach and prefers having a second tier role rather than a leading one in resolving the conflict.

Germany's Unwavering Support

Germany is Israel's main ally in Europe, considered to be Israel's most important trading partner after the U.S. As firm allies, Germany recognized the legitimate need of Israel to retaliate to Palestinians militant attacks. "The rocket attack on Israel is absolutely unacceptable and must end immediately," says the German Foreign Minister Heiko Mass. Not only the German Foreign Minister recognized the "right" of Israel to self-defense, but also called the "international community" to stop the violence; "This escalation of violence can be neither tolerated nor accepted". He added, "The rocket attack on Israel is absolutely unacceptable and must end immediately".

Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert said her government "condemns these incessant rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip against Israeli cities in the strongest terms", saying they "could not be justified". Amid the rising tension and the high number of Palestinian casualties and death rate, Germany said Israel had the "right to self-defense" against deadly rocket fire by Palestinian militants. Germany's biggest governing party also backs the government position toward Israel, whereby the flag of Israel has been raised in the headquarters of the party.

A day before the ceasefire take place, Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas visited Israel. "The fact that we see that Hamas is again firing missiles into the south of Israel...is for us an indication of how serious the situation is that the people of Israel find themselves in", the Foreign Minister said. Germany's vocal support for Israel, and for its right to self-defense reveals Germany's unwavering support to the security of Israel and its population, and reveals the reason behind Germany's refusal to condemn Israel's attacks against Gaza and the Palestinians.

However, the politicians' vocal support to Israel does not resemble the rest of the German population, whereby demonstrations took place on German grounds against Israel. Germany has done nothing to de-escalate the conflict by being biased toward Israel, condemning only Palestinians militant actions against the Israelis while ignoring the casualties and destructions caused by Israel attacks.

United Kingdom Limited Influence

The UK stance on the Israeli Palestinian recent conflict is all talk with no action. During the 11 days fighting between Israel and Hamas, the British government statements did little to inspire, and had no impact on the violence that took place on the Palestinian territories. Expectations on how the UK will interfere to ease down the tension, create a more robust foreign policy, and play a prominent role in the conflict were high, especially as an independent emerging power from the shadows of the EU; however, UK's actions was nothing more than reaching for worn-out idioms. The UK offered nothing new, leaving the world feeling disappointed.

In a recent interview, Palestinian ambassador to the UK, Husam Zomlot, called on the UK to do more than simply offering words. "A clear commitment by the UK government not by words but by deeds to fix the mess that was created", said the ambassador. The ambassador has also highlighted several key points that reveal the UK passiveness toward the Palestinians and the British government double standards by violating its own law, of these key elements is the U.S. arms exports to Israel. Under the criterion 2c of the UK's arms export licensing criteria, the UK government should not grant a licence if there is a clear risk that the arms might not comply with International humanitarian law. The Ambassador also set out a number of key actions the UK government should take to support the Palestinians.

On the 9th of May, the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, James Cleverly, said "The UK appeals for calm, and calls for an end to the violence witnessed in Jerusalem over recent days. All sides need to de-escalate tensions in the final days of Ramadan". Amid alarming casualties and death rate, Boris Johnson urged both sides in Israel and Gaza violence to "step back" on the 12th of May.

The UK did not only avoid from playing a prominent role in easing the tension, but has also supported the right of Israel to defend itself and retaliate. The UK's Ambassador to the UN and WTO in Geneva, Simon Manley has condemned the "indiscriminate attacks" conducted by Hamas and other militant groups on Israel. The ambassador added, "We are clear that Israel has a legitimate right to self-defense. All actions taken when exercising that right must be consistent with the principles of distinction, proportionality, humanity and necessity, in line with International Humanitarian Law, and avoid civilian casualties".

However, the ambassador alternated his firm approach to a more eased one by opposing settlements. The ambassador added "We consistently oppose settlements, demolitions and evictions across the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. Settlements are illegal under international law and damage the prospects for peace". The ambassador's statements and particularly the emphasis on the word "consistently" reveals the British government deliberate unchanged passive policy toward Israel's nonstop illegal settlements.

After Brexit, the UK worked to strengthen its ties with the Middle East, leaving regional and international partners to expect a decisive and firm foreign policy on key issues such as Palestine.

The UK excuse of abiding by the EU decisions is no longer accepted as it can no longer hide behind the European Union indecision or passiveness after Brexit. The UK failed to retain its credibility and ability to influence its partners.

The United States of America Commitment to Israel

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been a historical challenge for all U.S. administrations. The U.S. policy toward the Palestinian conflict has not radically changed over decades, where all administrations indicated a sharp pro-Israel policy. In light of the U.S. new administration, Biden policy hoped to shift its focus from the Middle East to Europe, trying to avoid being drawn to the region's conflicts. However, the tensions that took place in the Israeli and Palestinian territories have thrust the Israeli-Palestinian conflict back in the government's agenda. In addition, the first national security priority for the U.S. in the Middle East as listed in the Interim National Security Strategy is the security of Israel, "we will maintain our ironclad commitment to Israel's security". Nonetheless, Biden took a stand back approach.

Amid the rising violence, Biden has only engaged in phone talks with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas as a way of easing the tension. However, the president and most of the government politicians were consistently biased toward Israel. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin tweeted "I reaffirmed Israel's right to defend itself and condemned Hamas' deliberate targeting of Israeli civilians". In addition, like his predecessors, Biden gave unwavering support to Israel, saying "the US - Israel's closest and most important ally - fully supported the country's right to defend itself against indiscriminate rocket attacks".

The role of the President Joe Biden and the administration in reacting to the violence between the Israelis and Palestinians has raised disagreements and criticisms among the democrats, questioning the president's commitment and agenda to support human rights, and demanding more to be done to pressure Israel to abide by international law. Liberals have criticized the U.S. government for placating Israel and ignoring the new interim strategy emphasis on human rights as violence mounts in Palestine.

Biden's openly supporting Israel's right to self-defense without mentioning the Palestinians rights or casualties have led to the fuming of liberals and critics. "Do Palestinians have a right to survive?" asked New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Michigan Representative, Rashida Tlaib has also responded to the attack on the international media building saying "Israel targeting media sources is so the world can't see Israel's war crimes led by the apartheid-in-chief Netanyahu.

Senator Bernie Sanders, who lost the Democratic presidential elections nomination to Joe Biden, wrote an op-ed in the New York Times criticizing the administration, "In the Middle East, where we provide nearly \$4 billion a year in aid to Israel, we can no longer be apologists for the right-wing Netanyahu government and its undemocratic and racist behavior. We must change course and adopt an evenhanded approach, one that upholds and strengthens international law regarding the

protection of civilians, as well as existing U.S. law holding that the provision of U.S. military aid must not enable human rights abuses".

To ease down the criticism and highlight U.S. international role, Biden revealed the U.S. commitment to provide humanitarian assistance to Gaza and in reconstruction efforts in cooperation with the UN and in "full partnership" with the Palestinian Authority.

As Israel and Hamas heavily exchanged fires in May, the Biden administration blocked an effort by Norway, Tunisia, and China for the third time in a week to pass a UN Security Council statement criticizing Israel and calling for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. The U.S. move on Gaza at the UN raised concerns in regards to U.S. credibility, adherence, and commitment to international cooperation and the United Nations. At the height of the aggression, the U.S approved 735,000 million dollars military equipment to Israel.

Moreover, Biden showcased his support for the ceasefire resolution proposed by France on the 19th of May, in coordination with Egypt and Jordan, which came into effect on the 21st of May. The U.S. has praised the Egyptian efforts for brokering the ceasefire.

Biden has reiterated the longstanding U.S. policy with Israel, which is that Israel has the right to defend itself and its citizens. A day after the ceasefire went into effect; Biden expressed his support to Israel saying, "There is no shift in my commitment, the commitment to the security of Israel, period. No shift, not at all". He added, "My party still supports Israel. Until the region says unequivocally they acknowledge the right of Israel to exist as an independent Jewish state, there will be no peace."

Biden who aspired to present the U.S. as the world strongman has failed to condemn Israel for its international law violations and has damaged his credibility and international image.

Concluding Remarks

The recent Israeli-Gaza war has gained international focus. In no way the international community could have ignored the widespread ramifications that culminated from the latest escalated conflict between Israel and occupied Palestine. Solidarity protests and citizens activism against the human rights violations against Israel and eviction of Palestinians by settlers have mushroomed across Europe, Americas, and the Arab world.

After weeks of rising tension between Israel and Palestine in East Jerusalem that started with clashes at Al-Aqsa, the fighting between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza began on the 10th of May. The combination of police restrictions on Palestinians attempting to gather near the Damascus Gate, the heavy handed Israeli police use of force against civilians, the 'Lehava' march that called for the "death to the Arabs", the forcible evictions of Palestinians families from Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood have all contributed to the tension and the fighting that has spiraled between Israel and Palestine.

The Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue observes that the European Union, France, Germany, United Kingdom, and the United States have all reiterated their policy to support Israel

but on different scales. Their alarming and raising concerns lead to no outcome to the prospects of having a viable peaceful Palestinian state.

The European Union has limited added value to the recent conflict, as it has long failed to implement decisive and firm actions. A more firm approach and effective measures have to be implemented by the European Union to support the Palestinians fundamental human rights and their rights to have a sovereign Palestinian state. The report has also observed that the EU along with other external actors have been active players in the conflict; however, the results for stable peace are minimal.

The EU countries have long been divided over the Israeli Palestine question, with countries being very critical of Israel and other are strongest supporters of the state of Israel. Despite France adoption of a neutral balanced approach, it has condemned both parties for violating international law. France policy toward the recent conflict was indecisive, lost between a passive policy by calling the U.S. to play a more active role and an active engaged policy. However, France has alternated its passive policy and has engaged in mediation efforts with Egypt and Jordan to call for a ceasefire.

Germany, on the other hand, has provided Israel with unwavering support. The federal government has adopted a biased policy that utterly supported Israel without mentioning the Palestinians. The German government has openly demonstrated its concerns to the security of Israel and its population.

Moreover, the United Kingdom position on the recent tension is all talk with no action, despite the international community high expectations on the role of the UK, especially after Brexit. The UK distanced itself from interfering in the conflict but all together, it has expressed its support for Israel to defend itself and retaliate.

The rising international focus and the increasing tension, violence, and death rate have forced the Middle East, in particular the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on to Joe Biden's agenda. The administration resisted to condemn any violation of international law and human rights by Israel, such as the plan to evict Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. In this framework, Biden's agenda and commitment to human rights and international law has been badly damaged on a national and international level leading to the rise of criticisms by democrats and liberals who questioned the president's commitment to human rights.

The report observes that Washington's commitment to secure Israel and defend it from criticism has provided China with a golden opportunity to demonstrate its multilateral credentials, aligning itself with U.S. allies, and the United Nations principles.

The Biden administration will face the challenge of how to apply the agenda of human rights and the policy of reviving the U.S. as an international power committed to international law to the grounds after the U.S. position in the conflict, and in particular after rejecting the proposed UN Statement that called for ceasefire several times.

The European Union, France, Germany, UK, and the U.S. administrations are all striving for equal peace and utterly revealed their commitment to the two-state solution, but also worked to

undermine it by turning a blind eye to settlement expansion, the opting to move U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, and human rights violations by the oppressive occupied force. As long as International law does not comply on friends and allies, the conflict will never end, where the ceasefire will be a temporary solution before another conflict breaks out. As long as Western countries claim to stand up for human rights while they can't stand up to one country, Israel will proceed with its aggression toward the Palestinians. The conflict will end when the international community enforces its own international laws.