Israel-Hamas conflict: Violence in Gaza strip

What is the issue?

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The sudden flare-up in Gaza between Palestinian militant groups and Israel is another grim reminder that the situation in the blockaded Mediterranean strip remains precarious.

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Why Israel and Palestine are fighting?

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- Though both Jews and Arab Muslims date their claims to the land back a couple thousand years, the current political conflict began in the early 20th century.
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- Jews fleeing holocaust in Europe wanted to establish a national homeland in what was then an Arab and Muslim majority territory in the Ottoman Empire.
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- However, the Arabs resisted, seeing the land as rightfully theirs.
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- An early United Nations plan to give each group part of the land failed, and Israel and the surrounding Arab nations fought several wars over the territory.
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- Today's lines largely reflect the outcomes of two of the wars waged in 1948 and in 1967.
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- 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 large Palestinian populations.
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- But the violence continued and hence a two-state solution to create an independent Israel and Palestine was proposed as the mainstream approach in resolving the conflict.
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- The 1993 Oslo Accords marked the first time that the State of Israel and the

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) formally recognized one another and publicly committed to negotiate a solution to their decades-long conflict.
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- However, two-state vision requires Israel to abandon its opposition of Palestinian claims (to national sovereignty).
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- Ever since the Oslo Accords, giving statehood to the Palestinians has been the bedrock of any proposal to solve the conflict as it is considered the internationally acknowledged solution.
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What is the latest round of violence?

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- The latest violence was triggered by a botched spy operation by Israeli commandos inside Gaza that killed seven Palestinians, including a Hamas military commander.
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- Fatah is the largest faction of the multi-party Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) closely identified with the leadership of its founder Yasser Arafat.
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- Hamas is a Palestinian Sunni-Islamic fundamentalist organization.
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- In the 2006 parliamentary election, Fatah lost its majority in the Palestinian parliament to Hamas.
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- This led to a conflict between Fatah and Hamas, with Fatah retaining control of the Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank, while Hamas dominated Gaza.
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- Both organizations are Sunni Muslim and both are pledged to restore to the Islamic rule in Palestine.
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- Their fundamental disagreement is over the strategy for achieving this common purpose, i.e. Fatah believes more in peaceful process, whereas Hamas wants to resort to violence.
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- Thus, Hamas and Islamic Jihad fired hundreds of rockets and mortar shells into Israel in retaliation against the recent attacks.
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- Israel responded with airstrikes and artillery fire, hitting scores of military

posts and weapons depots across Gaza.
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- They levelled television and radio stations as well as Hamas's military intelligence headquarters.
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- This was the heaviest Israeli attack since the 2014 war on the impoverished enclave of 1.82 million people.
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- In past wars, Israel inflicted enormous havoc on the enclave's public infrastructure and caused high human casualties, while in retaliation Hamas fired rockets into Israel's civilian areas.
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- Israel has also imposed a land, sea and air blockade on the region in a bid to stop Hamas from amassing more weapons and to weaken its hold over the strip.
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- But Hamas continues to control Gaza, having found multiple ways to smuggle in weapons, while ordinary Gazans bear the brunt of the blockade.
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- The administration has no control on exports or imports, and is not even paying full salaries to government employees.
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- Hence Gaza is staring at the prospect of a fourth war in a decade against Israel.
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What should be done?

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- The situation has been particularly tense in recent months.
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- In March 2018, thousands of Palestinians marched towards the border, demanding their right to return to the homes whom were expelled after the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948, immediately after the creation of the state of Israel.
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- This is at the backdrop of Israel steadily expanded the settlements in the West Bank over the years, thus effectively killing the two-state solution.
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- About 750,000 Palestinians were estimated to have been forced out of their homes during the 1948 war.
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- The March of Return protests continued on the border since then, and have often been met with live bullets fired by Israeli soldiers.
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- Since March, at least 200 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli soldiers and thousands of others wounded.
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- This made Egypt and Qatar to step in, offering to mediate talks and provide much-needed resources to the enclave.
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- Israel initially responded positively, letting fuel tanks and Qatari money into Gaza.
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- This should have set the stage for further dialogue, but Israel's undercover mission inside the enclave sabotaged it, triggering the current crisis.
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- Even after both sides announced a ceasefire, violence on the border continued, underscoring how dangerous the situation is.
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- Hence they should restrain themselves, allowing peace efforts led by Egypt to continue.
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- Sufficient wars have been fought between the two sides over the course of history and hence Gaza currently needs aid, not another war.
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Source: The Hindu

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