

Israel Gaza conflict: Netanyahu says strikes to 'continue at full force'

Israel's military operation against Palestinian Hamas militants in Gaza will continue "with full force", Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said.

"We are acting now, for as long as necessary, to restore calm... It will take time," Mr. Netanyahu warned.

Gaza officials said 42 people, including 16 women and 10 children, died in the latest Israeli airstrikes.

Ten people, including two children, have been killed in rocket attacks on Israel since Monday, Israel said.

The overall death toll in Gaza now stands at 197 people, including 58 children and 34 women, with 1,235 injured, according to the Hamas-controlled health ministry. Israel says dozens of militants are among the dead.

- The Israel-Palestinian conflict explained

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council held an emergency meeting, with international mediators hoping to broker a ceasefire.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres opened the meeting by describing the violence as "utterly appalling" and said the fighting must stop immediately.



Rockets launched by Hamas have hit Ashkelon, southern Israel – Reuters

Sunday was the deadliest day so far

The Israeli airstrikes hit a busy street in Gaza just after midnight on Sunday, causing at least three buildings to collapse and dozens of deaths.

Hamas launched a barrage of rockets towards southern Israel overnight and during the afternoon.

Millions of Israelis scrambled to safe rooms or shelters as sirens went off. Palestinians also tried to take precautions, but in the densely packed and poorly resourced Gaza Strip, many had nowhere to go.

Riyad Eshkuntana told Reuters news agency he put his daughters to sleep in a room of his house that he thought was the furthest from the explosions. Only one of his daughters, Suzy, six, survived the night. His wife and three other children died.

“I ran to check up on the girls,” said Mr. Eshkuntana. “My wife jumped she hugged the girls to take them out from the room, then a second airstrike hit the room... The ceilings were destroyed and I was under the rubble.”

The Israeli military later said it had been conducted a strike on a militant tunnel system in the area. The tunnels' collapsed caused the houses above to collapse as well, leading to unintended civilian casualties, it said.



Suzy, six, was rescued from rubble in Gaza City on Sunday, but five members of her family died – Reuters

Israel's military says it has been targeting leaders and infrastructure linked to Hamas.

It said it had also struck the homes of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar and his brother Muhammad Sinwar, whom it described as the head of logistics and manpower for the movement.

It was unlikely they were at home at the time of the strikes, according to the Associated Press news agency.

Gazan rescue workers spent the day trying to rescue people from under the debris from the strikes.

The Palestinian health ministry said a doctor was among the dead: Dr. Ayman Abu Al-Ouf, head of internal medicine at Shifa hospital and part of the coronavirus team.

- What is Hamas?
- How Israel's Iron Dome missile shield works
- Boris Johnson condemns 'shameful' anti-Semitism in video

In Israel, Hamas rockets hit Ashkelon, Ashdod, Netivot, and other parts of central and southern Israel. There were no reports of casualties.

The Israeli military said it had seen the highest ever concentration of rocket attacks on its territory during the past week.

The country's Iron Dome defense system has intercepted many of them. But some caused damage to cars and buildings, including the Yad Michael synagogue in Ashkelon, where a hole was blasted through the wall just before an evening service for the Jewish holiday of Shavuot. No one was reported hurt and locals moved quickly to clear up the damage so the service could go ahead, according to the Times of Israel.





Israelis clean up a rocket-damaged synagogue in Ashkelon – Reuters

A car-ramming incident also took place in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem on Sunday evening. An Israeli police spokesman said the driver had been shot dead and four Israeli officers injured.

The threat to evict Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah to make way for Israeli settlers sparked the current round of violence between Israel and the Palestinians.

Those tensions culminated in clashes at a holy site revered by both Muslims and Jews, and, on Monday, Hamas began firing rockets after warning Israel to withdraw from the site, triggering retaliatory airstrikes.

How likely is a ceasefire?

By Paul Adams, the BBC diplomatic correspondent

Is Israel's military operation in Gaza, dubbed "Guardian of the Walls", nearing its conclusion?

Not obviously. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the attacks are continuing with “full force” and will “take time”.

In a news conference on Sunday, he admitted there were “pressures” but thanked US President Joe Biden, in particular, for his support.

Mr Biden’s envoy, Hady Amr, has been in Israel since Friday, discussing the crisis with Israeli officials.

Since the US, like Israel and many other countries, regards Hamas as a terrorist organisation, Mr Amr will not be meeting one of the two warring parties.

Any messages for Hamas will have to go through traditional interlocutors, such as Egypt or Qatar.

Local reports suggest Hamas has been offering some kind of ceasefire for several days, only to be rebuffed by Israel, which clearly wants to inflict as much damage as it can on the militants before the fighting is finally brought to a close.

These episodes follow a familiar pattern: Israel presses home its undoubted military advantage until the international outcry over civilian casualties, and a deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, demand that the operation end.

In Israel’s estimation, we have not reached that point yet.

What happened during the UN meeting?

The 15-member UN Security Council has been unable to agree on a public statement in recent days and none was forthcoming after the meeting.

The United States – a strong ally of Israel – is said to be the hold-out, believing it would be unhelpful in the diplomatic process.

In Sunday’s meeting, US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said the US was ready to offer support “should the parties seek a ceasefire” and had been working tirelessly to try to bring an end to the conflict.

Palestinian Foreign Minister, Riyad al-Maliki, spoke of Saturday’s attack on a refugee camp, which killed 10 members of the same family, leaving a five-month-old survivor to be pulled from the rubble. “Israel often asks us to put ourselves in

their shoes,” he said, “but they are not wearing shoes. They’re wearing military boots.”

In response, Israel’s Permanent Representative, Gilad Erdan, cited the death of a 10-year-old Arab-Israeli girl, killed by a Hamas rocket. He insisted Israel was mounting what he called “a heroic effort” to “dismantle terrorist infrastructure and avoid civilian casualties”.

Mr Erdan ended by urging the Security Council to unequivocally condemn Hamas but warned that Israel would take all steps necessary to protect itself.

Timeline: How the violence escalated

The worst violence in years between Israel and the Palestinian territory of the Gaza Strip has seen dozens killed. It follows a month of spiralling tensions before open conflict broke out. Here is what happened in the lead-up to the fighting.



Israeli police officers detain a young Palestinian man at the Damascus Gate – Getty Images

Clashes erupt in East Jerusalem between Palestinians and Israeli police.

Palestinians are angry over barriers that had been placed outside the Damascus Gate entrance to Jerusalem's Old City preventing them from gathering thereafter prayers at the Old City's Al-Aqsa Mosque on what is the first night of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

Palestinian discontent had been stoked earlier in the day when President Mahmoud Abbas called off planned elections, implicitly blaming Israel over voting arrangements for Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

Hamas - Mr Abbas' Islamist rivals who control Gaza and were running in the elections - react angrily to the postponement.

Violence around Damascus Gate and elsewhere in East Jerusalem continues nightly.

15-16 April

Rockets are fired from Gaza at Israel, which responds with airstrikes after a relative period of calm between Israel and the Palestinian enclave.

19 April

Clashes spread to the mixed Arab-Jewish port city of Jaffa, next to Tel Aviv.

20 April

In Jerusalem, Jewish youths, angry over a spate of filmed assaults by Palestinians on Orthodox Jews posted on the TikTok video-sharing app, attack Arabs and chant anti-Arab slogans.

23 April



Image caption Israeli security forces clash with Palestinians outside the Damascus Gate - IMAGE COPYRIGHT BY GETTY IMAGES

Hundreds of ultra-nationalist Jews shouting “Death to Arabs” march towards Damascus Gate in protest at the Arab assaults on Jews. Clashes erupt at the site between Palestinians and police trying to separate the two groups, injuring dozens of people.

Violence between Arabs and Jews spreads to other parts of the city.

24 April

Militants fire dozens of rockets at Israel from Gaza, drawing retaliatory airstrikes.

2 May

President Abbas’ Fatah faction and Hamas condemn the looming threatened eviction of Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah district of East Jerusalem by Jewish settlers ahead of a planned court hearing. Hamas calls on Arabs to form “human shields of resistance” there.

In the days that follow, police and protesters repeatedly clash at the site as it becomes a focal point for Palestinian anger.

4 May

Militants in Gaza begin sending incendiary balloons into Israel over successive days, causing dozens of fires.

7 May

Two Palestinian gunmen are shot dead and a third is wounded after opening fire on Israeli security forces in the northern West Bank. Israeli authorities say the group planned to carry out a “major attack” in Israel.



Image caption – The al-Aqsa mosque has been a frequent flashpoint for violence –
IMAGE COPYRIGHT BYGETTY IMAGES

Later on after Friday prayers – the last of Ramadan – major clashes erupt at the al-Aqsa mosque compound, injuring more than 200 people. Israel’s police force says it used “riot dispersal means”, firing rubber bullets and stun grenades after officers came under a hail of stones and bottles.

8 May

A second night of violence erupts in East Jerusalem after tens of thousands of

worshippers prayed at the al-Aqsa mosque for Laylat al-Qadr, the holiest night of Ramadan.

Police and protesters clash at Damascus Gate, with police using water cannon, rubber bullets and tear gas against crowds of Palestinians, some throwing stones.

More than 120 Palestinians and some 17 police are injured.

9 May

Israel's Supreme Court postpones the hearing on the Sheikh Jarrah case following calls to delay it because of the growing unrest. Tensions remain high though and more clashes take place between Israeli police and Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah and at Damascus Gate.

10 May

Early morning clashes break out between police and Palestinians at the al-Aqsa mosque compound, where crowds throw stones and officers fire stun grenades.

Palestinian anger has been inflamed by an annual Jerusalem Day march planned for later in the day by hundreds of Israeli nationalists to celebrate Israel's capture of East Jerusalem in 1967.

The march is due to pass through predominantly Arab parts of the Old City in what is seen by Palestinians as a deliberate provocation. It is rerouted at the 11th hour, but the atmosphere remains volatile with more than 300 Palestinians and some 21 police injured in the violence at the holy site.

Hamas issues an ultimatum to Israel to "withdraw its soldiers... from the blessed al-Aqsa mosque and Sheikh Jarrah" by 18:00. When the deadline passes without an Israeli response, rockets are fired towards Jerusalem for the first time in years.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says the group has "crossed a red line" and Israel retaliates with airstrikes, killing three Hamas fighters.

A continuing exchange of rocket fire and airstrikes quickly escalates into the fiercest hostilities between the two sides since they fought a war in 2014.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-57131272>

[Disclaimer]