**Blood and fire in Gaza**

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After 11 days of blood and fire, the fighting in Gaza has stopped. A ceasefire between Israel and Hamas came into force last week, ending the devastating exchange of bombing and rocket attacks that caused widespread destruction in the Gaza Strip and brought life in much of Israel to a standstill.

The truce was arranged by Egypt, following mounting international pressure to stem the bloodshed which erupted on May 10. The past two weeks have seen some of the worst violence in the region since the 2014 war in Gaza, with militants launching missiles and Israel pounding the blockaded coastal strip with heavy fire.

The entire world has heaved a sigh of relief and welcomed the end to the deadly dance of death in Gaza. The OIC, Arab League and the UN Secretary General have expressed satisfaction over the peace agreement. Speaking on behalf of Pakistan, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has expressed the hope that the ceasefire would be a first step towards establishing durable peace in Palestine

[PM says NAB recovered Rs484bn during PTI's govt](https://nation.com.pk/26-May-2021/pm-says-nab-recovered-rs484bn-during-pti-s-govt)

US President Joe Biden has hailed Egypt’s role in brokering the peace agreement: “I believe we have a genuine opportunity to make progress and I’m committed to working towards it.”

Britain has also welcomed the ceasefire, with Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab saying: “All sides must work to make the ceasefire durable and end the unacceptable cycle of violence”. A statement from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office said the security cabinet had “unanimously accepted the recommendation of all of the security officials [...] to accept the Egyptian initiative for a mutual ceasefire without pre-conditions”. In separate statements, Hamas and Islamic Jihad also confirmed the ceasefire.

After the ceasefire, both sides have claimed victory. Senior leaders of Hamas told a cheering crowd of thousands of Palestinians that it was a celebration of victory. Shortly after the truce was announced, Islamic Jihad said it had “managed to humiliate” Israel. On the other hand, the Israeli government in a statement said its aerial campaign had made “unprecedented” achievements in Gaza, a territory it has blockaded since 2007.

[Pakistan loses Rs209 billion in tobacco taxes in last five years: Report](https://nation.com.pk/26-May-2021/pakistan-loses-rs209-billion-in-tobacco-taxes-in-last-five-years-report)

Violence erupted in the first week of April after weeks of tensions in Jerusalem over planned evictions of Palestinians from their homes in east Jerusalem to make way for Jewish settlers, and heavy-handed police tactics at the sensitive Al-Aqsa mosque compound. Israel’s bombardment began after attacks on Palestinian protesters at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound. Hamas had given Israeli forces a 6:00pm deadline to leave the compound.

When the deadline expired, Hamas launched rockets, while the Israeli army began to hit military and civilian targets in Gaza.

According to media reports, Hamas and other armed groups in Gaza fired more than 4,300 rockets into Israel which killed 12 people, including two children and an Israeli soldier. On the other hand, Israeli strikes on Gaza killed 232 Palestinians, including 65 children, and wounded another 1,900. Vast areas in Gaza, including residential and commercial buildings, have been reduced to rubble. Over 120,000 people have been displaced because Israeli bombing destroyed their living quarters.

[Govt makes COVID tests mandatory for international passengers](https://nation.com.pk/26-May-2021/govt-makes-covid-tests-mandatory-for-international-passengers)

Israel’s brutal pounding of civilian targets in Gaza drew worldwide condemnation.

A statement by the 57-nation Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) called for an immediate halt to what it described as Israel’s barbaric attacks on Gaza. The OIC statement came after a virtual meeting in which Saudi Arabia condemned the violation of the sanctity of Muslim holy sites and evictions of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem. The OIC also accused the United Nations Security Council of inertia and called on Israel to respect Muslims’ access to Al Aqsa Mosque as well as stop settlers from forcibly evicting Palestinian families from their homes.

Now that the fighting has stopped, what next? UN chief Antonio Guterres, who also welcomed the deal, said Israel and the Palestinians now had a responsibility to have “a serious dialogue to address the root causes of the conflict”. He also called on the international community to work with the UN on a “robust package of support for a swift, sustainable reconstruction and recovery”.

[Pakistan reports 2,724 new COVID cases in one day](https://nation.com.pk/26-May-2021/pakistan-reports-2-724-new-covid-cases-in-one-day)

Needless to say, the biggest hurdle to peace in Palestine is the hypocrisy of the big powers, especially the United States, which in blatant violation of the UN charter and international laws and conventions continue to extend blind support to Israel and its acts of aggression against the defenceless Palestinian people.

The region will remain in the throes of endless war and destruction until the Palestinians are given their right to live in peace in a land that is theirs. Trouble arises when Israeli settlers force Arab families out of their homes. Past years have seen systematic Israeli effort to change the demographic structure, historical and legal status and Arab-Islamic character of Al-Quds Al-Shareef. This is the root cause of the conflict and chaos in Palestine.

As many ME experts have pointed out, the elements of a just and durable peace in Palestine must include an end to Israel’s occupation of Arab land and illegal settlements and apartheid like regime imposed in the occupied territories. Simultaneously, steps should be taken to implement the UN resolution for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. As for the rival claims on Jerusalem which is holy to Islam, Christianity and Judaism, the matter can be settled by declaring it an international city under UN control.