2021 Israel-Hamas Conflict

On May 10, 2021, a multifaceted security crisis exploded on the ground in Israel, Gaza and the region, much of it building upon long-term tensions and dynamics.

In the weeks prior to the outbreak, there were growing tensions across Jerusalem, including a number of violent clashes between Palestinian protestors and Jewish extremists as well as with Israeli police. The clashes were sparked by a number of issues, including discontent over Israeli control over gathering and access to religious sites during Ramadan, videos of attacks by Arabs against Jews in Jerusalem and Jaffa that were posted on social media, the Palestinian Authority’s cancelation of planned elections, and widespread anger over a pending Supreme Court ruling about the evictions of Palestinians from certain properties in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem.

Further violence then erupted related to significant clashes in and around the Temple Mount/Holy Sanctuary in Jerusalem between Palestinians and Israeli police, including Israeli police entering the Al-Aqsa compound, reportedly in response to stone throwing at Jewish worshippers at the Western Wall.

On May 10, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), two Gaza-based Palestinian U.S.-designated terrorist organizations, claiming to be “defending Al-Aqsa,” began launching rockets and missiles into Israel. For eleven consecutive days, over 4,300 rockets and missiles were fired from Gaza towards Israeli civilian centers, throughout the south and central parts of the country, including Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Millions of Israelis were forced to take cover in bomb shelters. This was especially true in the south, including in cities such as Ashkelon, Ashdod and
Beer Sheva, which were severely impacted by the rocket attacks.

Israel’s military estimates that as many as 90 percent of these projectiles were intercepted by the Iron Dome anti-missile system, saving an untold number of lives. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) also reported that scores of missiles launched by Hamas fell short of their intended targets in Israel and landed inside Gaza itself.

In response to the near-constant barrage of rockets, the Israeli military launched what it called “Operation Guardian of the Walls” targeting Hamas and PIJ sites and operatives throughout Gaza via airstrikes and artillery fire. This included a number of high-rise buildings that the IDF asserted were being used by the leadership of these terrorist organizations as well as underground tunnels, where Hamas moves forces, stores weapons and prepares attacks.

Following 11 days of fighting, on May 21st, a ceasefire was announced between Israel and Hamas that was facilitated by Egypt, Qatar, the U.S. and other diplomatic engagement.

All told, 13 people were killed in Israel by Hamas/PIJ rockets, and at least 248 Palestinians were killed in Gaza, including many children.

The operation took a large toll in the Gaza Strip, and exacerbated the widening humanitarian crisis within the coastal enclave. Israel asserted that it took extensive precautions to limit civilian casualties, including notifying people in the high-rise buildings prior to a targeted attack and through the use of precision-guided weapons. While Israel says a significant number of the casualties were Hamas operatives, there were, to be sure, large numbers of Gazan civilians who were killed and wounded in these operations.

In addition, as the crisis unfolded between Israel and Hamas, there was an
alarming outbreak of violence in a number of Israeli cities which have significant
populations of both Jewish and Arab citizens. Extremists engaged in arson,
looting and rioting. Jewish and Arab-owned businesses and vehicles were
targeted and damaged. Synagogues came under attack as well. There were also a
number of incidents in which Arab and Jewish individuals were intentionally
targeted and beaten in the streets.
One Israeli Jew died as a result of the violence.

Additionally, outside of the region, there was a surge of antisemitic incidents
targeting Jewish communities and individuals in the United States and around
the world.