

US sends diplomat to try to quell Israeli-Palestinian violence

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WASHINGTON: The United States dispatched a senior diplomat on Wednesday to urge Israelis and Palestinians to calm the worst flare-up in violence between them in years.

The violence has appeared to catch the Biden administration off guard as it pursued other priorities.

In remarks welcomed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Secretary of State Antony Blinken defended Israel's right to protect itself and condemned rockets fired by Hamas, the Islamist group that controls the Gaza Strip. He also said Israel had a particular obligation to avoid civilian casualties. Israel said it killed 16 members of the Hamas armed wing in Gaza in a barrage on Wednesday. At least 56 people have been killed in Gaza since violence escalated on Monday, according to the enclave's health ministry. Six people have been killed in Israel, medical officials said.

The military action follows unrest involving Israeli police and Palestinian protesters near Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem.

Blinken, who spoke by telephone to Netanyahu, said he had sent Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Hady Amr to meet with both sides.

"He will urge, on my behalf and on behalf of President (Joe) Biden, a de-escalation of violence."

Biden has yet to name an ambassador to Israel, a post his predecessor Donald Trump had filled before his inauguration. Other top state department officials handling the region are still awaiting approval from the Senate. Deflecting suggestions that the long-standing conflict has not been a priority, Blinken repeatedly described the administration as "fully engaged." "We are deeply engaged across the board. State Department, White House, senior officials, with the Israelis, Palestinians and other countries and partners in the region to call for and push for de-escalation," Blinken said. A senior State Department official, asked if Biden would speak with Netanyahu, said further "high level engagement" from Washington was to be expected.

In his remarks, Blinken drew a distinction between "a terrorist organization, Hamas that is indiscriminately raining down rockets in fact targeting civilians, and Israel's response, defending itself."

However, he added: "I think Israel has an extra burden in trying to do everything they possibly can to avoid civilian casualties, even as it is rightfully responding in defense of the people."

Netanyahu's office said: "Prime Minister Netanyahu thanked Blinken for the US support for Israel's right to self-defense, a right that the secretary of state reiterated in this call."



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[Anthony Blinken](#)

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Israel declares curfew in Arab-Jewish town hit by violence UK PM urges Israel, Palestinians to 'step back from the brink'

[Israel declares curfew in Arab-Jewish town hit by violence](#)

Author:

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Wed, 2021-05-12 20:41

L0D/ISRAEL: Jews cleared Torah scrolls from a torched synagogue on Wednesday and burnt-out cars lined nearby streets in an ethnically mixed Israeli town

hit by violence denounced by the president as “unforgivable” acts by Arabs incensed at air strikes on Gaza.

Moving to head off further violence in Lod, which has also seen assaults by Jews on Arab passersby, police declared a night-time curfew and deployed heavily armed reinforcements.

In several other areas populated by Israel’s 21 percent Arab minority, Palestinian flags adorned electricity poles and hundreds of residents have turned out for protests, sometimes clashing with police or Jewish residents. “We have lost control of the city and the streets,” Lod Mayor Yair Revivo told Channel 12 News after nightly confrontations, in which an Arab townsman was shot dead, a killing in which two Jewish suspects have been arrested. Scores of other people have been arrested in Lod and in majority-Arab towns in central and northern Israel, including Umm Al-Fahm along the West Bank border and Jisr Al-Zarqa on the Mediterranean coast, police said.

In Lod, men carried Torah scrolls through the blackened and debris-strewn yard of the torched synagogue. President Reuven Rivlin described events in terms recalling anti-Semitism abroad.

“The sight of the pogrom in Lod and the disturbances across the country by an incited and bloodthirsty Arab mob ... is unforgivable,” he said, calling the flying of the Palestinian flag by protesters “a brutal assault on shared existence.”

Israel’s Arab minority – Palestinian by heritage, Israeli by citizenship – is mostly descended from the Palestinians who lived under Ottoman and then British colonial rule before staying in Israel after the country’s 1948 creation.

Most are bilingual in Arabic and Hebrew, and feel a sense of kinship with Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip. They often complain of systemic discrimination, unfair access to housing, health care, and education services.

Tension in Arab-Jewish towns has risen as Israel conducted air strikes in Gaza and Palestinian militants fired rockets into Israel in an escalation of violence since clashes in East Jerusalem on Monday morning.

Ibrahim, an Arab councillor with the Lod municipality, said: “What is happening now is (an) uprising that is going on (in) cities like Ramle, Lod, Jaffa, Acre and Haifa,” calling events in Gaza and Jerusalem a “red line” for Arabs.

In the coastal city of Acre, Uri Buri, a Jewish-owned fish restaurant, was set fire to and some Arab residents said they were scared to leave home. In Jaffa, near Tel Aviv, Arab protesters clashed with police firing stun grenades to disperse them.

“We condemn that our people’s solidarity and cohesion with our brethren in Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip is being channelled through acts of sabotage to public and private property, as is now happening at Umm Al-Fahm’s entrance,” said Samir Mahamid, Mayor of Umm Al-Fahm.

Neighbourhoods with Arab residents, including Lod and Jaffa, were among those where sirens were triggered by rocket fire. An Arab resident of Lod and his daughter were killed on Wednesday when a vehicle was hit by a rocket, Israeli authorities said.

In Haifa and Jaffa, and in the Arab city of Nazareth, protesters have chanted slogans in support of Palestinians facing eviction from an East Jerusalem neighborhood under a long-running legal case.

Arab citizens of Israel were among the thousands of protesters who have faced off in recent days with Israeli police near Al-Aqsa mosque and elsewhere in Jerusalem's Old City.

A spokesman for the Hamas Islamist militant group in Gaza encouraged Arab citizens to "rise up" against "our enemy and yours."



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Gaza violence: 40 killed, more than 200 wounded in relentless Israeli airstrikes and Hamas rocket barrage
Ocasio-Cortez slams fellow Democrat for supporting Israel airstrikes

[Syrian landmines wash into Lebanon due](#)

to floods

Wed, 2021-05-12 18:44

BEIRUT: As authorities continue to find and extract land mines left behind from the Lebanese Civil War, a new wave of explosives has entered the country's border due to a natural disaster.

The Lebanese Armed Forces on Wednesday said landmines planted along the Lebanese-Syrian border have washed into Lebanese territories due to winter flooding.

"Landmines planted on the Lebanese-Syrian borders are a result of the Syrian conflict," a Lebanese military source told Arab News.

"As these mines drifted into Lebanese territories, it has become harder for the Lebanese army to clear them. Multiple accidents have been recorded this year, which has injured many who were not familiar with the nature of the foreign objects they found."

The source said a majority of accidents occurred in the northern border region due to the flooding and soil erosion caused by the winter floods. All injuries were on Lebanese soil.

The army command issued a statement, which warned "ammunition comes in different shapes and sizes and may be camouflaged in different ways and dispersed randomly."

Areas that are potentially contaminated with landmines are not marked with signs or barbed wire to warn people yet. The army command has urged citizens to avoid suspicious areas, stay on paved roads, and not to approach or tamper with any object or unexploded ordnance.

The Lebanese Mine Action Center (LMAC), which is part of the Lebanese Armed Forces, has been carrying out the Lebanese National Mine Action Program with support from the UN Development Program to cover shortfalls.

The LMAC aims to secure a safe country where civilians can walk and move freely without the threat of landmines by the year 2025. The center's mission focuses on areas in south Lebanon, which is the most contaminated area with landmines and suspicious objects.

"The closer we get to a minefield in the remote areas of south Lebanon, the more red-painted stones we see," United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) Officer Captain Yang Dong from China said.

"The red stones remind us of safe and unsafe areas. They remind us not to step around. If there are red stones nearby, it is dangerous and there could be some mines there."

In Jan. 2020, the UNIFIL's scope of work increased with the signing of a new agreement with the LMAC while the country marked International Day for Mine

Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action on April 4.

Over the past five years, the UNIFIL's demining efforts have cleared nearly 5 million square meters of mine-infested land in south Lebanon. It has also destroyed more than 43,500 landmines, bombs, and unexploded ordnances.

The threat of landmines is real and spreading awareness is vital for the Lebanese people.

Since 1975, landmines and unexploded materials left behind from the Lebanese Civil War have led to 3,847 deaths and injuries. The most casualties were recorded in 2006 when 209 people were killed or injured, including 40 children under the age of 12.



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UNIFIL rescues boat carrying 32 Syrians, 1 Lebanese
Lebanese security forces foil attempt to smuggle fuel across Syria border

Gaza block collapses after Israeli strike, rockets hit Tel Aviv

Author:

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Tue, 2021-05-11 22:07

GAZA/JERUSALEM: A 13-story residential block in the Gaza Strip collapsed on Tuesday night after being hit by an Israeli air strike, witnesses said.

Three people were wounded in a retaliatory rocket attack from Gaza on Tel Aviv

Video footage showed three plumes of thick, black smoke rising from the Gaza tower, its upper stories still intact as they fell. The building houses an office used by the political leadership of the enclave's Islamist rulers, Hamas.

Electricity in the surrounding area went out, and residents were using flashlights.

Shortly after the attack, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad group said they would respond by firing rockets at Tel Aviv.

Air raid sirens and explosions were heard around the city, and the skies were lit up by the streaks of multiple interceptor missiles launched toward the incoming rockets.

Pedestrians ran for shelter, and diners streamed out of Tel Aviv restaurants while others flattened themselves on pavements as the sirens sounded.

Israeli television stations said three people had been wounded in the suburb of Holon.

The Israel Airports Authority said it had halted take-offs at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion airport "to allow defense of (the) nation's skies."

The US State Department urged restraint on both sides.

"We are now carrying out our promise," Hamas's armed wing said in a statement. "The Qassam Brigades are launching their biggest rocket strike against Tel Aviv and its suburbs, with 130 rockets, in response to the enemy's targeting of residential towers."

Hours earlier, Israel had sent 80 jets to bomb Gaza and massed tanks on the border as rocket barrages hit Israeli towns for a second day, deepening a conflict in which at least 28 people in the Palestinian enclave and two in Israel have been killed.

Residents of the block and people living nearby had been warned to evacuate the area around an hour before the air strike, according to witnesses, and there were no reports of casualties two hours after it collapsed.

The most serious outbreak of fighting since 2019 between Israel and armed factions in Gaza was triggered by clashes between Palestinians and Israeli police at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque on Monday.

The city, holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians, has been tense during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, with the threat of a court ruling evicting Palestinians from homes claimed by Jewish settlers adding to the friction. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would step up its strikes on

Gaza, an enclave of 2 million people, in response to the rocket attacks. "Both the strength of the attacks and the frequency of the attacks will be increased," he said in a video statement. Within an hour, Israel said it had deployed jets to bomb rocket launch sites in and around Gaza City. Officials said infantry and armor were being dispatched to reinforce the tanks already gathered on the border, evoking memories of the last Israeli ground incursion into Gaza to stop rocket attacks, in 2014. More than 2,100 Gazans were killed in the seven-week war that followed, according to the Gaza health ministry, along with 73 Israelis, and thousands of homes in Gaza were razed. On Tuesday, before the block collapsed, the Gaza health ministry said at least 28 Palestinians, including 10 children, had been killed and 152 wounded by Israeli strikes since Hamas on Monday fired rockets toward Jerusalem for the first time since 2014. Israel's national ambulance service said two women had been killed in rocket strikes on the southern city of Ashkelon. The International Committee of the Red Cross urged all sides to step back, and reminded them of the requirement in international law to try to avoid civilian casualties.



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UK FM condemns Gaza rockets, not Israel20 Palestinians killed as tensions mount on Gaza border

[IAEA report says samples from Iran's Natanz plant showed 63% uranium enrichment level](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-05-11 20:33

Reuters: A report by the International Atomic Energy Agency says samples taken from Natanz showed 63% uranium enrichment



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