NIAS-IPRI Brief

The 2014 Gaza Ceasefire
A Stopgap to Peace dividend

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The 2014 conflict between Israel and Gaza was intense and long. The conflict ended with an Egypt-brokered ceasefire that temporarily halted the fighting but failed to address deeper issues. This brief will look into the Gaza ceasefire of 2014 and its failure to nurture further peace processes between Israel and Gaza.

Introduction

The 2014 conflict between Israel and Gaza is one of the most significant flashpoints between both parties in this decade. The conflict started with the Israeli Defence Forces conducting Operation Protective Edge and lasted for nearly 50 days. When it ended, over 2,205 Palestinians and 71 Israelis were killed, around 5,00,000 Palestinians were displaced and nearly 18,000 housing units bombarded in the Gaza Strip. The conflict also tightened Israeli grip over the West Bank and East Jerusalem, resulting in the eradication of Hamas operatives from the region. Hamas, on the other hand, managed to unite smaller militant groups in Gaza during the war and have asserted their dominance in Gaza ever since. The roots of the conflict go back to the 1960s when Israel annexed the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Since then, numerous peace processes have failed to foster peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The 2014 war was the by-product of one such failed peace process that stayed true to tradition and ended with a ceasefire that incited another conflict between Israel and Hamas a few years later. This brief aims to look into the ceasefires that were established during the conflict and how it resulted in crippling further peace processes between both parties.

A brief background to the ceasefire

The Israel-Palestine animosity has been prominent since 1922 when the League of Nations fulfilled a British mandate that promised Jews a national home in Palestine. However, the rift

between both parties became irreversible in June 1967 during the Six-Day War fought by Israel against its neighbours. Israel's victory in the war increased their foothold in the region and granted them control over the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the Gaza Strip. Soon after, Israel began expanding Jewish settlements, particularly in East Jerusalem and the West Bank to break up Palestinian territories from each other. The move forcefully pushed tens of thousands of Palestinians out of their ancestral homes. In December 1987, the Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank started a movement known as intifada to bring an end to Israeli control over Palestinian territory and to create an independent Palestinian state. The movement garnered a lot of national and international support and led to the formation of the Oslo Accords in September 1993. The Oslo Accords gave a framework for negotiation of peace between Israel and Palestine. However, the accord failed to establish peace between both parties and the Palestinians started a second intifada in September 2000. The second intifada changed the dynamics of the conflict as it brought violence and bloodshed into the picture. The Israelis managed to suppress the movement by 2005 despite suffering heavy losses. The second intifada also changed Israeli politics towards Palestinians. Laws towards Palestinian citizens became stringent, Palestinian evictions increased in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, Palestinian majority areas were blockaded and under surveillance, and the Gaza Strip was completely cut off from the other Palestine majority areas. These unjust practices encouraged numerous Palestinian militant groups from Gaza and the West Bank to conduct terror attacks on Israeli cities, to which Israeli forces retaliated immediately.

The 2014 conflict between Israel and Gaza started after the nine months the US-mediated peace talks between Israeli and Palestinian authorities failed. The talks were meant to foster better cooperation between both parties and to bring an end to the long-standing animosity. As soon as the peace talks collapsed, Israeli presence in the West Bank increased and new settlement projects were underway. Protests by Palestinian citizens followed immediately in an attempt to halt the growing Israeli presence in their neighbourhoods. On 15 May, 2014, two young Palestinian men were killed on Thursday in clashes with Israeli security forces during a demonstration for Nakba Day.[1] This incident sparked outrage and protests throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and changed the agenda of the protests from stopping Israeli expansion to reclaiming Palestinian statehood. On 12 June, 2014, three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped in the West Bank by Hamas operatives. Initially Hamas did not

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[1] Jodi Rudoren, "*Two Palestinians Killed in Clashes with Israeli Forces,*" The New York Times, 2014

acknowledge the kidnapping but later investigation did confirm the role of a former Hamas operative in the kidnapping. The Israeli government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used the kidnappings to rally the Israeli public against Palestinians. Once the government had convinced the public that any measure could be taken to retrieve the boys, Israeli forces flooded the West Bank in an attempt to find the missing teenagers and arrested numerous Hamas members and officials. On 30 June, the dead bodies of the three teenagers were found, sparking intense riots in Israel. Palestinian citizens were attacked and their establishments and houses were damaged. As an immediate response to the atrocities committed against Palestinians living in Israel, rockets were launched from Gaza and the Israeli Defence Forces began retaliating with air and artillery strikes. Israeli forces in the West Bank also killed 10 Palestinians, arrested 300 and raided close to 1000 homes in a move to catch as many Hamas operatives as possible. The Netanyahu government had asserted their dominance in the West Bank and subdued the Palestinian authority leading the region. However, on 2 July, a Palestinian teenager was burnt to death by three Israelis as revenge against the killing of the three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank. The death of the Palestinian teenager led to violent riots in East Jerusalem, and a barrage of rockets were fired from Gaza by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The death of the teenager not only brought Gaza into the picture, but also gave other militant groups in the region a reason to target Israel. As the rocket and mortar fire from Gaza intensified and Hamas were heavily targeting Israeli cities, the Israeli forces strategically concocted a plan to destroy multiple militant bases, weapons depots and underground tunnels in the Gaza Strip.

On 8 July, the IDF implemented the plan through Operation Protective Edge. The main aim of the operation was to disrupt the underground tunnels used by Hamas and to restore security to Israeli citizens. The first phase of the operation was carried out through aerial strikes. The strikes were targeted at Hamas infrastructure and members. Within the first ten days of the operation, underground tunnels and numerous weapons depots used by Hamas were destroyed by Israeli forces. The second phase of the operation was carried out by a ground invasion where Israeli forces raided cities and villages in the Gaza Strip looking for Hamas operatives and underground tunnels. By the twentieth day of the operation, Israeli forces had destroyed stockpiles of weapons saved by Hamas for future attacks and destroyed multiple underground tunnels connecting Gaza with Israel. In a move to protect their assets, Hamas began using civilian shields and public buildings to carry out their attacks. This tactic enabled Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza to fire nearly 2,622 missiles and mortars into Israel.

Israeli forces found it difficult to carry out attacks without facing high civilian casualties. Nearly 70% of the casualties in Gaza were civilians, and the international community was not pleased with Israel's actions. The final phase of the operation began on 3rd August, and the IDF called back its ground troops after successfully destroying 32 tunnels used by Hamas. According to IDF figures, the entire operation had allowed Israeli forces to attack 4,762 terror sites throughout the Gaza Strip and kill 1,068 terrorists. The IDF lost 68 soldiers in Operation Protective Edge.[2]

The Peace talks and Ceasefires: A need of the hour tools

Ceasefires have primarily been seen as military tools used to halt violence for specific periods of time or as a teleological bridge between war and peace.[3] The 50-day war between Israel and Gaza consisted of 11 ceasefires out of which 10 were short-lived. The peace talks held during the conflict were mainly mediated by Egypt, the Arab League or the United States.

On 15 July, the first ceasefire came into effect unilaterally as Israel agreed to a ceasefire brokered by Egypt. Hamas and other militant groups from Gaza did not accept the ceasefire and continued to fire missiles at Israel. After not responding to the missiles for 6 hours, the Israeli forces continued their air and artillery strikes on Gaza.

On 16 July, Hamas announced a set of conditions for a ten-year truce with Israel. The conditions were:
- Israel should free all those arrested after the three Israeli youths were killed
- Israel should withdraw its tanks from the Gaza border
- The siege on Gaza should be lifted along with the trade blockades
- Gaza should have an international airport and seaport under the supervision of the UN
- The fishing zone for Gaza fisherman should be increased to 10 kms
- International forces should guard the Israel-Gaza border and not the IDF
- The Rafah Crossing should come under the supervision of the UN and Arab states
- Restrictions for accessing the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem should be relaxed
- Israel should not interfere with any reconciliation agreement.
- Re-establishing an industrial zone and improvements in further economic

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[2]"Operation Protective Edge", Israeli Defence Force, 2014

[3] Marika Sosnowski, "*Towards a typology of ceasefires: order amid violence*", Taylor and Francis Online, 2020

development in the Gaza Strip.[4]

The conditions were immediately rejected by Israel and the fighting continued even after Israel agreed to a five-hour ceasefire on 17 July.

On 20 July, upon the request of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Israel agreed for a two-hour humanitarian window for the wounded and the dead. Forty minutes into the ceasefire, Hamas fired missiles at Israel, breaking the ceasefire. Israeli forces did not retaliate for nearly four hours after which they conducted raids on multiple Hamas bases.

Between 26 and 27 July, the first UN-requested ceasefire was implemented and for nearly a day there was no fighting between both parties. As the ceasefire came to an end, Israel proposed an extension to the ceasefire which was promptly dismissed by Hamas. Fighting continued for a couple of hours after which Hamas called for a 24-hour humanitarian ceasefire which they later proceeded to break by firing missiles into Israel. Israel, however, did not retaliate immediately and chose to extend the ceasefire agreement. With the Muslim festival Eid al-Fitr on 28 July, Hamas called for an extension of the ceasefire which was accepted by Israel.

On 30 July, Israel called for another short humanitarian ceasefire for medical aid and supplies to reach Gaza at the behest of the international community. However, Hamas operatives decided to break the ceasefire just minutes after it had begun. This greatly disrupted the humanitarian aid required to tend the wounded and feed the displaced in Gaza. The following day on 1st August, peace processes between Hamas and Israel took a turn for the worse when Israel accepted an UN-proposed ceasefire but Hamas broke it by conducting a suicide bombing (that killed two IDF soldiers) and kidnapping a second lieutenant in the IDF, Hadar Goldin and killing him later. Israeli forces increased attacks on Hamas for the next three days.

Between 4 and 8 August, two ceasefires were implemented in order to get humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The first ceasefire was proposed by Israel and gave a 7-hour window for humanitarian aid to be undertaken. The second ceasefire was proposed by Egypt and gave a 72-hour window for the fighting to stop and for Israeli forces to pull out from the Gaza Strip.

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[4] International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, "*Operation 'Protective Edge': A Detailed Summary of Events*", ICT Publications, 2014

During both ceasefires, Hamas continued to fire missiles into Israeli cities and towns. Though Israeli delegates had accepted an extension to the ceasefire from Egypt, Palestinian delegates opposed its renewal.

Between 10 and 18 August, the Israeli forces had reduced their strikes on Gaza despite Hamas firing rockets into Israel. A 72-hour ceasefire was proposed by Israel on the 10 and was later extended for another five days. Hamas had also reduced its attacks on Israel during this time. However, on 19 August, Hamas violated the ceasefire agreement and sent rockets into two Israeli cities. This triggered an immediate response from the IDF who conducted air raids on terrorist targets in Gaza.

Finally, on 26 August, Egypt-brokered open-ceasefire agreed upon by both Israel and Palestinian delegates. The ceasefire was supported by the US and Qatar and did not specify any further agreements to foster peace between both parties. The ceasefire did not give any guarantee for the fulfilment of the ten conditions given by Hamas either. Though Hamas were not pleased with the ceasefire, they could not continue their attacks on Israel due to a lack of resources and an increasing uproar amongst the residents of Gaza. The Israeli government declared themselves as the winners of the 50-day war and announced that they had accomplished all their objectives successfully. In reality, Israel was also forced to stop the fighting by the international community due to increasing civilian casualties in the Gaza Strip.

Challenges within and without the ceasefire

Divisions within Hamas

During the 50-day war, multiple ceasefires failed mainly because of the division within Hamas. Even when Hamas called for ceasefires, Hamas operatives would break it within a few hours forcing Israeli forces to retaliate heavily. Hamas was not a singular entity as numerous smaller groups headed by their own leaders made up Hamas. The initial strikes conducted by the IDF were focused on the residencies of Hamas leaders rather than their operation bases. The deaths of Mohammed Abu Shamalah, Raed Attar and Mohammed Barhoum, whom the Islamist movement's military wing described as three of its most prominent leaders in Rafah[5] created small pockets of Hamas operatives who did not operate in tandem with each other. If

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[5] Joshua Mitnick & Asa Fitch, "*Three Senior Hamas Military Leaders Killed in Israeli Airstrike in Gaza*", The Wall Street Journal, 2014

Hamas had been one unified group, then the first ceasefire could've been sustained and Israel wouldn't have launched a ground assault into Gaza. Even after the conflict de-escalated and the ceasefire was established, rockets were fired into Israel by militants from Gaza.

Sectoral conflict within Israel

Another key challenge in establishing an extended ceasefire was the violent protests in the West Bank and East Jerusalem areas. Even when Israel and Hamas were not fighting, the Palestinian residents in Israel were in a constant tussle with Jewish settlers. This sectoral conflict within Israel did not allow either party to stop fighting and pushed them to carry on the fighting.

Conclusion

The Gaza ceasefire saw a decline in violence between Israel and Gaza but did not stop the deep-rooted conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Two of the main outcomes that allowed the conflict to fester after the ceasefire were:

Lack of follow-through peace accords to strengthen ties between both parties

Both, Israeli and Palestinian leaders wanted different outcomes from peace processes. Israel for example wanted the East Jerusalem area to be the capital of Israel and the Palestinian leaders wanted the Israeli occupied territory to form the state of Palestine. These differences not only took any negotiation or peace deal off the table but also divided the international community in taking any progressive steps. The neighbouring Arab countries vehemently opposed Israel's operation in Gaza and pushed the UN to take action against Israel. Western powers like the US on the other hand supported Israel's right to defend its territorial sovereignty and pushed for terrorist groups like Hamas to be eradicated.

The rise of Hamas in the Gaza Strip

The popularity of the Hamas militant group among Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip spiked significantly following the 50-day war with Israel.[6] The Palestinian government in the West Bank run by Fatah and President Abbas lost hold of the Gaza Strip after failing to act immediately during the conflict. Members from other militant groups in the Gaza Strip such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad also joined Hamas, making the group stronger.

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[6] "*After Gaza war, poll finds support for Hamas rises*", The Indian Express, 2014

Since then, Hamas has proudly asserted themselves to be the only ones standing for the Palestinian people and their interest. Their hatred towards Israel have totally blocked any form of peace agreement from becoming successful. Hamas knows their forte in gaining public support is by attacking Israel and fighting for an independent Palestinian state and they have stuck to it and it continues to keep them in power.

The Gaza ceasefire was not intended to sustain lasting peace but rather give an illusion that the fighting had stopped. In reality, the ceasefire was used as an opportunity by both Israel and Hamas to strategize further conflicts. Hamas managed to restock its weapons and build new underground tunnels to carry further attacks on Israel. The Israeli government increased border protection and increased surveillance throughout the Gaza Strip. The Israeli government led by Netanyahu also used the Gaza war as a political stunt to garner more votes creating space for right-winged parties to thrive. Netanyahu's stern approach towards Hamas won him public support and he made sure the support continued by turning stone-cold to any deals from Hamas or Gaza.

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The International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI) is part of the Conflict Resolution and Peace Research Programme at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS).

The IPRI undertakes research on varied issues affecting a peace process and conflict regions every year. In 2020, IPRI undertook a larger study to analyse the response of the federal states to the COVID-19 pandemic in India. Marking the 20 years of the UNSC Resolution 1325, the initiative has started a new study to look at gender roles in securing peace. The IPRI has also completed a study in understanding the global protests movements from Chile to Hong Kong.

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