

China-Middle East relations

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## China calls for ‘calm and restraint’ as Israel declares war after deadly Hamas raid

- China is ‘deeply concerned about the current escalation of tension and violence between Palestine and Israel’, foreign ministry says in ceasefire call
- At least 232 Palestinians and 300 Israelis are reportedly dead after a surprise Hamas assault on Saturday sparked Israeli air strikes on Gaza



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Israeli anti-missile systems intercept rockets launched from the Gaza Strip, as seen from Ashkelon in southern Israel on Saturday. Photo: Reuters

China has called for an immediate ceasefire in a major escalation of the decades-old conflict between Palestinian fighters and the Israeli military.

The Chinese foreign ministry said on Sunday that Beijing was “deeply concerned about the ... escalation of tension and violence between Palestine and Israel”.

“All parties concerned [are urged] to exercise calm and restraint, to cease fire immediately, to protect the civilian population and to prevent further deterioration of the situation,” it added.

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## 5 things to know about the unprecedented Hamas attack on Israel

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Saturday that his country was “[at war](#)”, following a surprise attack by Hamas militants.

In the aftermath, at least 313 Palestinians were killed and nearly 1,990 wounded in a day of conflict, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

The Israeli death toll climbed to 350, with more than 1,800 wounded and dozens taken hostage in Gaza. The Israeli foreign ministry said the number of casualties was expected to rise soon.

In its statement, the Chinese foreign ministry did not issue any condemnation but said that the latest round of conflict “fully demonstrates that the long-term stagnation of the peace process is unsustainable”.

“The fundamental way out of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict lies in the implementation of the [two-state solution](#) and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state,” it said, referring to a 1993 Israeli-Palestinian deal setting out the path towards a lasting peace in the region.

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In Beijing, a senior official with the Israeli embassy said the long-awaited response from China was not strong enough.

“When people are being murdered, slaughtered in the streets, this is not the time to call for a two-state solution,” Yuval Waks, deputy chief of the Israeli mission in Beijing, said on Sunday afternoon.

“We believe that China as a superpower in this world, which many countries are looking to see the reaction of China, should have taken a stronger stand.”



Smoke rises after Israeli forces attacked a high-rise building in Gaza City. Islamist Hamas has launched a large-scale surprise attack on Israel. The Israeli military retaliated by shelling Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip. Photo: APA Images via ZUMA Press Wire/dpa

Beijing has avoided taking sides in Middle East conflicts, presenting itself as a friend to Israel, Palestine, Iran and other Arab states.

Historically, though, China has been aligned towards the Palestinian cause largely because of its Cold War support for national liberation movements.

China's deputy ambassador to the United Nations, Geng Shuang, said earlier the Palestine issue "should be accorded higher priority" in the international agenda.

In a speech on September 27, the transcript of which was published hours after Saturday attacks, Geng said "the continued expansion of [Israeli] settlements" was "encroaching on Palestinian land and resources and squeezing the Palestinian population".

He also reaffirmed China's position to support the establishment of an independent Palestine state based on 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The border refers to the armistice lines from before the Arab-Israeli six-day war in June 1967, when Israel captured the Gaza Strip from Egypt and the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, along with other land.

This expanded Israel's territory beyond the borders marked out by a 1949 armistice with its Arab neighbours Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon.

It also brought more than a million Palestinians in the occupied territories under Israeli rule.



Israeli forces take cover on the side of a street in Ashkelon, Israel, as sirens wail while barrages of rockets are fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel on Saturday. Photo: AFP/Getty Images/TNS)

Diplomatic observers in China said a peace deal between Palestine and Israel was at the centre of China's Middle East strategy.

Fan Hongda, from the Middle East Studies Institute at Shanghai International Studies University, said the latest attacks by Hamas could be related to the fears that "Palestine is being marginalised".

"As long as the Palestinian issue is not resolved and as long as there is no change in the current Israeli position on the issue, a conflict between the two sides is inevitable, and Hamas, for example, may carry out similar actions at any time it deems appropriate."

Fan said peace between Israel and Palestine could hardly be achieved by an outsider.

Unlike previous clashes in Gaza, Saturday's attack was unusual as it appeared to be a full-scale conflict mounted by Hamas with incursions into Israeli lands and the capture and

killing of civilians.

Israel is expected to further harden its position towards the Palestinians, especially in the Gaza Strip, which has been under Hamas control since 2007.

“This will leave even less room for peace between Israel and Palestine, at least in the short term,” Fan said.