



SPS Insights

Israel Palestine Tension 2023



This report looks at the recent tension and violence occurring across Israel and Palestine since the election of Benjamin Netanyahu. Looking to map and analyse the renewing violence with insights for travel and business safety.

Summary

The conflict between Israel and Palestine has a long history dating back to 1947 and remains a highly controversial and complicated issue. Yet, since the election and return to power of Benjamin Netanyahu, the region has witnessed further increases in conflict and fatalities. According to the UN, 2022 was the deadliest year for West Bank Palestinians since 2005, with Palestinian deaths at the hands of Israeli authorities increasing by nearly 100% when compared with 2021. The UN has warned that the conflict is “again reaching a boiling point”. This trend has only spiralled since the start of 2023, with analysts now worried about the potential for a third ‘Intifada’ (Palestinian uprising) as the yearly death toll has already reached at least 78. These dangerous developments threaten both domestic security and the security of the wider region.

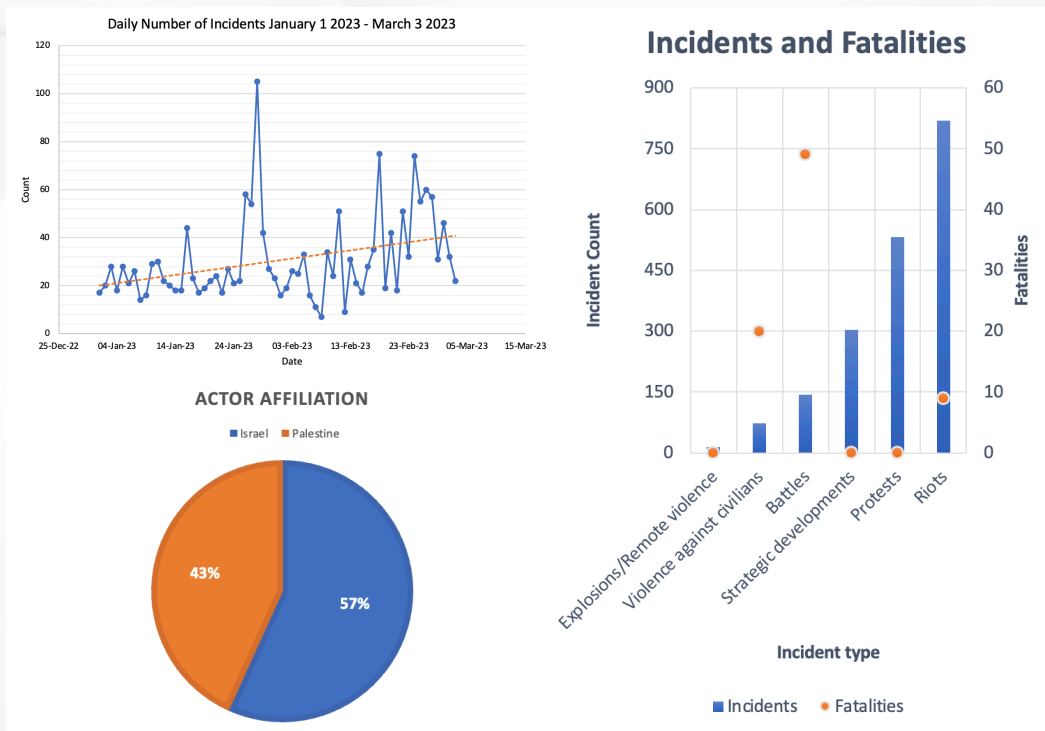
While there have been many violent flare ups between the two sides since the ending of the Second Intifada, until now both have maintained some restraint with violence not matching that seen in the years prior to 2005. Yet what became a flashpoint for the Second Intifada, was a visit by the then opposition leader Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount, a holy site in both Judaism and Islam. In early January 2023 history repeated itself, as Israel’s

controversial right-wing National Security Minister Ben-Gvir made a similar, highly armed visit to the holy site, much to the dismay of the Palestinian people. This has become the flashpoint for further violence, including the terrorist attack in East Jerusalem that killed seven Israelis on January 27th, the deadliest incident perpetrated against Israel by Palestinians since 2008.

Both prior and after this terrorist attack Benjamin Netanyahu’s far right coalition have inflamed tensions with widespread retaliatory measures. The use of lethal force by both sides has risen causing death tolls to surge, additionally further encroachment of Israeli settlers has been supported, and chronic impunity has spread through Israel’s security forces as fewer investigations have occurred into killings and ill treatment of Palestinians. With Israel increasingly using lethal force as a proactive measure regardless of the level of threat, the situation is becoming increasingly untenable. Peace accords are a distant prospect due to a far-right government hellbent on increasing security measures, coupled with Palestinian unrest as the political organisations of restraint increasingly fall out of favour. Further escalation looks highly likely with fatalities and security concerns on the rise.



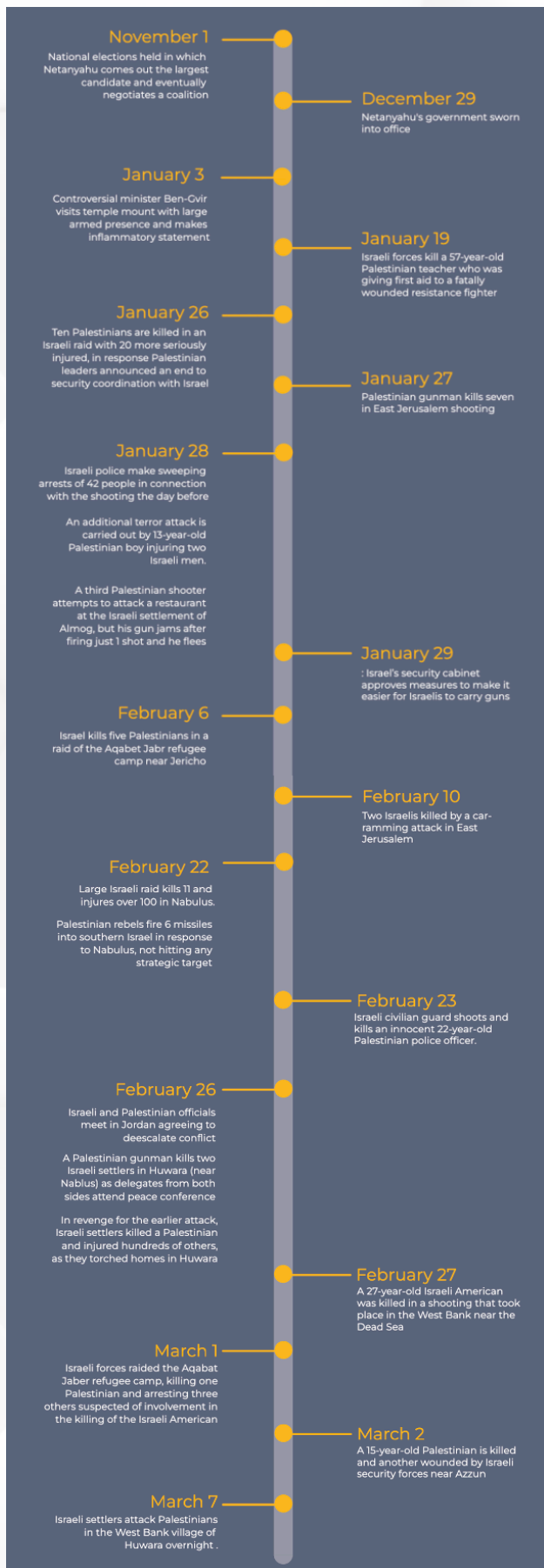
Mapping of Incidents



Data Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) 2023, Middle East, January 1, 2023 - March 3, 2023, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>

Utilising the internationally well-regarded Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) as a source for the data we produced the visualisations which map violent incidents since the new year to March 3rd. We witnessed fluctuations in daily violent incidents highlighting the unstable security environment in the region. The largest frequency of incidents took place between January 26th-28th, where a collection of terrorist attacks in East Jerusalem and retaliatory Israeli operations totalled 229 violent incidents. However, overall we see a clear trend of increasing violent events and deteriorations of the security environment, with the trend line showing a clear rise from a daily average of 20 incidents to over 40 incidents. This is a worrying trend that reflects a worsening security environment and increasing number of attacks. The pie chart highlights Israeli involvement in 57% of incidents, that show while fatalities have overwhelmingly been Palestinian, incidents are not only affecting Palestinian lives but indeed pose a risk to all those travelling or living in the region. We have also shown the breakdown of incidents by type, which highlights the fact that that while more individual and potentially fatal threats from explosions, violence against civilians and battles, remain lower, they have still taken the lives of some 59 citizens. Crucially protests and riots have seen soaring levels, emphasising a wider growing disgruntlement in both Israeli and Palestinian communities, demonstrating the sheer scale of community political dislocation. These events can provide not only direct threats to personal security through the increasing use of violence, but more broad security challenges to travel and business operations, with tight security measures often instilled in their aftermath. Finally, we can see the high levels of strategic developments, numbering at 300, as an ominous sign for contextually significant events which may trigger future unrest. Taken together the data shows a clear trend of increasing escalations and an increased impact across all in the region.

Timeline



While tensions predate the start of the year we have witnessed a clear increase in rhetoric and violence since the new year and the election of Benjamin Netanyahu . Violence has been ever present in the region but today holds a heightened risk as tensions escalate.

January:

Through January tensions began to increase following the inflammatory remarks made by security minister Ben-Givri at the temple mount. Throughout the month further politically hard-line rhetoric came from the newly installed government over controversial issues from troop deployment to illegal settlements. This rhetoric was succeeded by a pre-emptive Israeli-led security raid into Palestinian territories on the 26th January that led to the loss of 10 Palestinian lives with many more injured. In response Palestinian authorities announced the end of joint security coordination and the country descended into days of terrorist attacks, counter security operations, and widespread unrestrained violence.

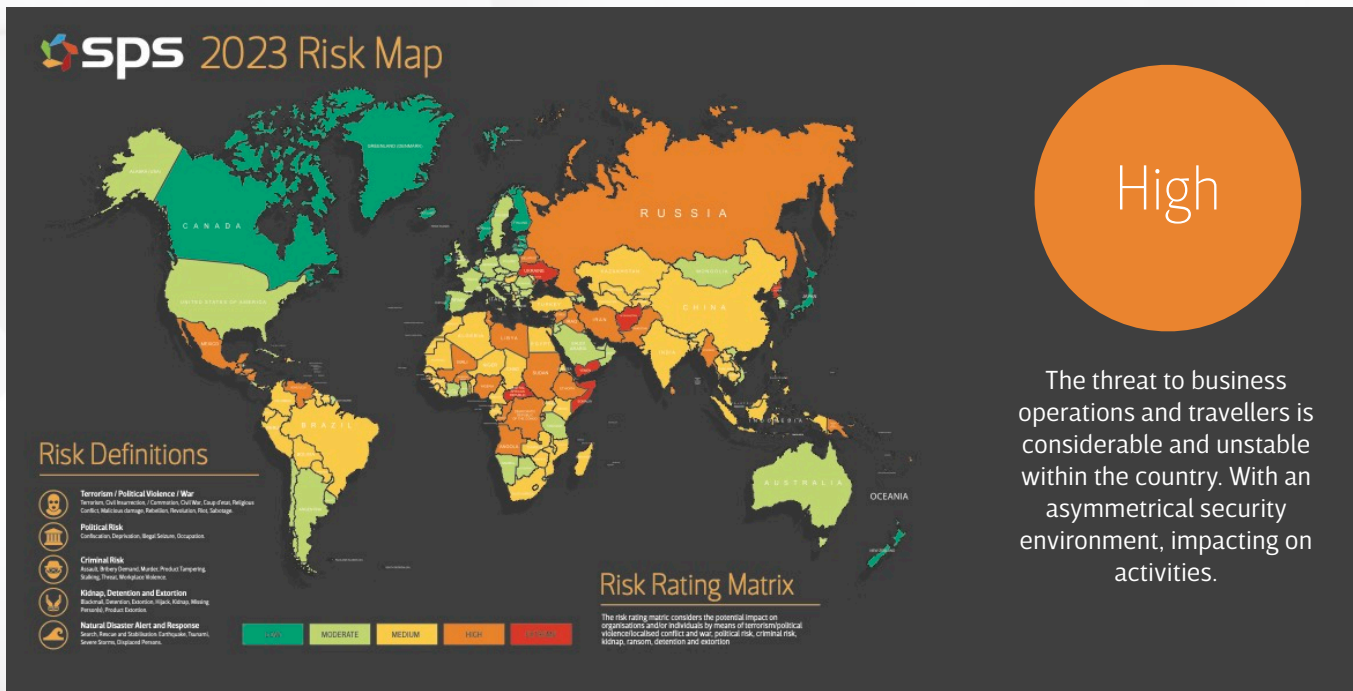
February:

After the peak in incidents witnessed in late January- the cyclical trend of security operations followed by Palestinian terror attacks preceded through February. The month saw consistent violent incidents again increasing throughout the month, with tensions at a recent high. Short-lived negotiations in late February failed to be successful as the conference held in Jordan was undermined by a Palestinian gunman and subsequent Israeli outrage in the occupied region. Notably, following the Palestinian terror attack, it was Israeli settlers, not security forces, who responded by burning homes in Palestinian Huwara, highlighting the growing violence perpetrated by citizens, not just the state.

March:

Early signs suggest that March will see similar patterns. Only time will tell what the future holds but within the first week new attacks have further underscored the rising tension across the territories.

Risk Assessment and Future Outlook



Traveller Risk



The main risks associated with travel in the region come from the direct risk of physical harm from military, terror or police operations. Travel to the Gaza Strip or Golan Heights are internationally advised against. Further risks are posed in locations across the West bank, including notably Jerusalem, where conflict may have direct impacts on your personal safety. The recent killing of an American-Israeli highlights this. Increasing tensions in the region leave enhanced security measures that may prove an impediment on travel.

Business Risk



The main risks facing businesses are attached to the nation's wider instability. Increasing riots and protests may close facilities, while supply chains face increasing delays at internal security checkpoints. The wider increase in conflict threatens to undermine the nations stability and hence its ability to operate as a productive economy. International and legal opposition to Israeli settlements may also cause reputational and economic damage to businesses operating or housing workers in such illegal settlements.

Risk Outlook

The evidence presented clearly positions Israel and Palestine as a high risk country due to its considerably unstable nature. While there are asymmetric security threats across internal location, the increasing violence and risk of further unrest is grave. It is highly likely that Israel and Palestine will witness continuing increases in tension and violence in the coming months. While we are not yet at a state of a third Intifada, it is now a realistic possibility. The problems and tensions have a long shadow, but today looks set to provide further tension as it becomes one of the most watched security environments of 2023. Political rhetoric from both sides enhances the potential for future widespread conflict as the situation remains unresolved and untenable.



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