

Gaza Protests Spark Deadly Violence Along Israeli Border

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The recent clashes were intended as the first salvo in a longer-term border confrontation, so the potential for escalation is high.

Friday's demonstration in Gaza, during which at least 15 Palestinians were killed and more than 1,000 injured, marked the beginning of a protest effort slated to culminate on May 15. The campaign centers on Palestinian "right of return" demands, which Israel has rejected as anathema to its very existence as a homeland for the Jewish people.

Why it matters: The protests are the most intense confrontations between Palestinians and Israel since the 2014 Gaza war. Coming at a highly volatile time, with both the peace process and internal Palestinian politics in crisis, these protests are likely to escalate in the weeks ahead and may spread to the West Bank.

The background: Reconciliation talks between Hamas and the dominant Fatah party have collapsed, and both organizations are rapidly losing support among the Palestinian public. While Hamas dominates these protests, all Palestinian factions, including Fatah, are cosponsoring them.

Internationally, this campaign aims to confront Israel with the dilemma of responding to largely unarmed mass protests. The protestors plan to maintain a constant presence in newly erected camps along the Gaza-Israel border—symbolically named after villages destroyed in the 1948 war—with spikes of activity on Fridays and other significant dates, such as Land Day (March 30), the opening of the U.S. embassy in Jerusalem and the 70th anniversary of the 1948 war.

Domestically, however, Hamas hopes these protests will build its own support network. Many of the demonstrators are not Hamas members, yet Hamas has uncontested control over the Gaza Strip and is administering the protests in practice.

What's next: These demonstrations risk further outbreaks of violence, even if not at the level of the 2009, 2012 and 2014 wars. While primarily slated to take place in Gaza, they could worsen the West Bank's security situation if they

spread there spontaneously or in an attempt by Fatah to flaunt its ability to mobilize crowds and burnish its nationalistic credentials.

Ghaith al-Omari is a senior fellow at The Washington Institute. This item was originally published [on the Axios website \(https://www.axios.com/gaza-protests-spark-deadly-violence-along-israeli-border-a8411784-5810-45c6-ad48-7f0589f76985.html\)](https://www.axios.com/gaza-protests-spark-deadly-violence-along-israeli-border-a8411784-5810-45c6-ad48-7f0589f76985.html). ❖

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