

European countries gradually distancing themselves from Israel

International Desk

Israel has become locked in a diplomatic dispute with Spain and Belgium after the two European countries denounced the regime's crimes in the Gaza Strip and called for the recognition of the Palestinian state.

The Israeli and Spanish foreign ministers exchanged harsh words and summoned each other's ambassadors for reprimands as the dispute spiraled on Friday while Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and his Belgian counterpart Alexander De Croo continued a visit to the Middle East. Speaking in Al-Quds alongside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday, Sánchez had said the number of civilians killed by Israeli attacks on Gaza was "unbearable".

And on Friday, on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing into Gaza, Spain's leader said Israel was not acting within the limits of humanitarian law. "The indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians, including thousands of boys and girls, [is] completely unacceptable," he said.

His words, and similar sentiments expressed by De Croo,

drew a sharp response from Eli Cohen, Israel's foreign minister. "We condemn the false claims of the Prime Ministers of Spain and Belgium which support terrorism," he wrote on X.

Unacceptable accusations

Spain was taken aback by the Israeli foreign minister's response, said one Spanish official. Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares in a statement on Friday night condemned Israel's "false, misplaced and unacceptable accusations". Albares said Israel's response was "especially serious" because it was aimed at the Spanish prime minister, whose country holds the six-month presidency of the Council of the EU, and the leader of Belgium, which takes over the same role on January 1. At the Rafah crossing, De Croo said Israel's military operation had to respect international humanitarian law. "The killing of civilians needs to stop now. Way too many people have died," he said. "The destruction of Gaza is unacceptable. We cannot accept that a society is destroyed in the way it is being destroyed."

EU countries and G7 members have been divided over how

much pressure to put on Israel to rein in its bombardment and allow humanitarian aid into Gaza. Other allies of Israel have started to adopt a tougher line on the stark human cost of its war in Gaza.

While acknowledging Israel's right to self-defense, David Cameron, the UK's foreign minister, said in an interview with the BBC on Friday that he had told Israeli officials that "they must abide by international humanitarian law, that the number of casualties are too high".

'Settler violence'

Cameron added that the "settler violence" against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank is "completely unacceptable", and that those responsible should "be arrested, prosecuted and imprisoned".

Spain has consistently spoken up for Palestinians and Sánchez on Friday called for the EU to formally recognize the state of Palestine.

Switzerland had also expressed strong support for Israel in the beginning.

However, on November 20, the country's foreign minister an-

nounced that Switzerland will continue to support the International Criminal Court's (ICC) investigations, including into the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

France, which has generally tried to maintain a balance in its relations with Israel and the Arab world for decades, was swift to draw attention to the indiscriminate nature of Israeli attacks on Gaza, after its initial strong expressions of support.

No reason for killing babies

President Emmanuel Macron openly called for a cease-fire in a BBC interview on Nov. 10, saying there is "no reason" for babies, women and the elderly to be killed, urging Israel to stop its assault.

France has reiterated the importance of a political solution, improving living conditions in Gaza, as well as opposing any plan that would include the re-occupation of Gaza by Israel.

Ireland is also among the other countries who has been strong in their criticism of Israeli attacks on Gaza.

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar has described the attacks on

Gaza as "something approaching revenge," while Foreign Minister Micheal Martin repeated that the offensive has been disproportionate.

Recognition of Palestinian state

In Norway, a bill passed with overwhelming majority in Parliament "asks the government to be ready to recognize Palestine as an independent state when recognition could have a positive impact on the peace process, without making a final peace accord a condition."

Since the start of the conflict on October 7, many countries have cut diplomatic ties with Israel or recalled their ambassadors to show their anger at Israel's atrocities in Gaza, which have claimed the lives of more than 14,500 people in the Palestinian territory.

South American countries of Belize and Bolivia have broken off diplomatic relations with Israel. Back on October 27, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva slammed Israel's war on Gaza as a "genocide", saying that what is happening is not a war.

On the early days of the conflict,



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (C) shakes hands with Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander De Croo (R) and Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez during a meeting in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah on November 23, 2023.

● ALAA BADARNEH/AFP

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro also accused Israel of committing "genocide" against the Palestinians.

"We have witnessed in the past massacres and brutal atrocities against the Palestinian people." The current situation, he pointed out, is a "new apartheid system" against Palestinians.

Turkey, Colombia, Chile and Honduras have recalled their ambassadors for consultations.

South Africa has also been highly critical of Israel's military operation in Gaza.

On Tuesday, its MPs passed a motion recommending the Israeli Embassy's closure until there is a cease-fire and a commitment to negotiations. Earlier this month, South Africa also recalled its diplomats from Israel.

Israel's crimes in Gaza have also sparked pro-Palestinian protests on a daily basis across the world.

Opportunity to pressure Israel



By Ebrahim Beheshti
Staff writer

OPINION

The 47 days of uninterrupted bombing of the Gaza Strip caused enormous damage to the people of the Gaza Strip and to the resistance groups. More than 14,800 people have died and much of the infrastructure in the Gaza Strip has been destroyed. These losses have not been without achievement. It is not wrong to say that the most important achievement for the Palestinian people and the Gaza Strip came from the margins of the Palestinian issue.

Over the past few weeks, there have been unprecedented rallies and rallies around the world, especially in Europe and the United States, in support of the people of Gaza and against

Israeli atrocities. Some Western politicians whose governments are staunch supporters of Israel have had critical reactions to Israel's criminal acts, insisting that the Palestinian issue must be decided and the decades-old oppression against the Palestinians must end.

Spain's prime minister has insisted that the European Union should recognize an independent Palestinian state. Even the US government, which was Israel's main backer in the Gaza invasion, has been forced to moderate its positions in recent days, and President Joe Biden has argued in a Washington Post article that the US goal should not just stop today's war, but to end it forever. British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said Israel would never be safe without security and stability for the Palestinians.

Whether out of pity for the Palestinians and the awakening of

their conscience, whether out of reality and acknowledgment of the power of Palestinian fighting groups and the steadfast Palestinian determination to exercise their historic right, these Western comments represent a global consensus and demand for an end to the ongoing violence against Palestinians. Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel, with significant casualties including the deaths of more than 1,200 people and the capture of more than 200 Israelis, sent a clear message to both Israeli leaders and supporters in the West that Israel's superiority of military power does not mean that only Palestinians are victims of insecurity and violence.

In addition, this top military power has never been able to provide lasting security to its citizens over the past few decades, and in the all-out battle with Hamas in Gaza after 47

days of airstrikes and ground attacks, it did not succeed in destroying Hamas or releasing one of its prisoners. Then he opened fire and exchanged the fire. John Bolton, a hardline US figure and former national security adviser, has called the deal and prisoner exchange a victory for Hamas.

Thus, supporters of Israel are perhaps more prepared than ever to exert pressure on Israel not out of sympathy for the Palestinians but out of concern that Israel is more vulnerable and the apparent contradiction between assertive Western values such as human rights and what is happening in Palestine. It seems that the Resistance Front and Arab and Islamic countries should put more active diplomacy on the agenda to critique or stabilize Palestinian gains. They must not allow the infliction of enormous damage on the Gazan people to be forgot-



ten without any established gains in the interests of Palestine. The first step is to try to make the cease-fire permanent, and to continue to seize the opportunity to reclaim the Palestinians' rights.



People raise flags and signs during a demonstration in support of Palestinians at Washington Square Park in New York City on November 24, 2023.

● YUKI IWAMURA/AFP