US quashes Security Council call for probe of Gaza deaths

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By AFP

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The United States on Monday blocked the adoption of a UN Security Council statement that would have called for an independent probe of deadly violence on the Israel-Gaza border, which erupted as the new US embassy in Jerusalem was opened, diplomats said.

“The Security Council expresses its outrage and sorrow at the killing of Palestinian civilians exercising their right to peaceful protest,” read a draft of the statement, a copy of which was seen by AFP.

“The Security Council calls for an independent and transparent investigation into these actions to ensure accountability,” read the text.

In the bloodiest day in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since a 2014 Gaza war, at least 58 Palestinians were killed in the clashes and more than 2,700 Palestinians wounded, according to figures from the Hamas-run Gazan health ministry.

They erupted before Israeli officials and a White House delegation including President Donald Trump’s daughter Ivanka formally opened the embassy in Jerusalem, and the bloodshed continued throughout the day.

The dead included eight children under the age of 16, according to the Palestinian envoy to the United Nations.

Israel blamed Hamas for the deadly violence, saying the terror group had encouraged and led the protests, which included attacks on Israeli troops and attempts to breach the border fence.

The IDF’s spokesman said Hamas deployed 12 separate terrorist “cells” to try to breach the border at different locations, and that all were rebuffed.

Citing Hamas sources, Israel’s Hadashot TV news said 10 of the terror group’s members were among those killed in the clashes, including a son of its co-founder Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi.

Several countries condemned the violence, including members of the Security Council.

British Prime Minister Theresa May’s spokesman urged “calm and restraint”.

French President Emmanuel Macron condemned the violence, emphasizing that “Palestinians have the right to peace and security” and reiterating his commitment to a two-state solution.

The Security Council is due to hold an emergency meeting on the violence Tuesday, called at the request of Kuwait.

The Palestinian UN envoy wants the Security Council to condemn the killings.

Meanwhile, Israeli ambassador Ddanny Danon called on the council to condemn Hamas, the Islamic militant group that rules the coastal Gaza Strip and led the protests.

It’s not immediately clear what will come out of the discussion. At an emergency meeting after similar protests in March, council members urged restraint on both sides but didn’t decide on any action or joint message.

The draft statement seen would expressed “grave concern regarding recent developments in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967, including East Jerusalem, particularly in the context of the peaceful protests in the Gaza Strip and the tragic loss of civilian lives.”

“The Security Council calls upon all sides to exercise restraint with a view to averting further escalation and establishing calm,” it said.

“The Security Council calls on all States not to undertake any steps that further aggravate the situation, including any unilateral and unlawful measures undermining the prospects of peace.”

It also said that any decisions and actions “which purport to have altered the character, status or demographic composition of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal effect” — a reference to the US decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

The Palestinians see East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state.