

## **Violence in Jerusalem and Beyond**

*May 9, 2021*

**Recent days have seen significant clashes between Palestinian protestors and Israeli security forces. While the violence has centered on Jerusalem, it has now also spread to other parts of Israel, Gaza and the West Bank.**

### **Clashes in Jerusalem and the West Bank**

- Since Friday, more than 300 Palestinians as well as least 25 police and security officers have been injured in violent clashes.
- On Saturday night, the main protestors emerged from a crowd of more than 90,000 Palestinians who gathered on the Temple Mount for prayers to mark the Muslim holiday of Laylat al-Qadr.
- While violence has centered on the area of the Temple Mount, it has also spread to other areas of Jerusalem, especially the Old City's Damascus Gate and the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood.
- In addition, violence has now reached beyond the capital, with clashes taking place in many locations, including Jaffa and Hebron.
- Israel Police have also thwarted a "major attack" in Jerusalem, when three Palestinians opened fire at troops in the West Bank on Friday. According to police, the terrorists had planned to commit a "major attack" against civilians in Israel.
- Israel Channel 12 reported that there are acute alerts of other potential terror attacks in the West Bank and Jerusalem in the coming days.
- In the current unrest, Palestinians have hurled stones bottles, fireworks and more at police, and in at least one incident, shots were fired at Israeli security services.
- Israel Police has significantly bolstered the number of officers in Jerusalem, and the IDF has deployed additional troops throughout the West Bank.

### **Response**

- Police have tried to limit their response by using non-lethal crowd control devices such as tear gas, stun grenades and rubber bullets. In a sign that this policy is succeeding, despite the severity of the rioting, no rioters, or police, have been killed.
- In an attempt to control the situation on Saturday, Israel Police stopped numerous buses traveling to Jerusalem in an attempt to prevent additional young Arabs from heading towards the Old City. However this caused further anger with claims that Muslim worshippers were being prevented from reaching their holy sites, and all buses were eventually permitted to continue.

- Also, as a result of the bus stoppages, major traffic jams were reported on the roads leading into the capital, with traffic coming to a complete standstill at the main entrance to Jerusalem, Highway 1.
- In a statement, the police said that they “respect all religions and will continue to allow freedom of worship. At the same time, (we) will not allow protesters to arrive in Jerusalem for the purpose of participating in violent disturbances.”
- Prime Minister Netanyahu similarly stated, “We are acting responsibly to ensure law and order in Jerusalem while maintaining freedom of worship at the holy sites.”

### **Gaza and Israel’s North**

- In response to the rioting and in “solidarity with the protestors,” a [rocket was launched](#) toward southern Israel from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. No injuries or damage were reported as the rocket landed in an open field.
- In response to the rocket fire, the Israel Air Force struck a Hamas military target in the Strip.
- Palestinians in Gaza also launched numerous incendiary balloons which flew over the border. One landed in the backyard of an Israeli family, but caused no significant damage.
- In addition, major confrontations took place along the border with Gaza on Saturday night. Thousands of Palestinians rioted near the border fence, hurling explosive devices and other objects at Israeli troops, who responded with tear gas and rubber bullets. There are no official reports of the number of injuries, although some media are reporting Palestinian protestors who were injured after having been shot by rubber bullets.
- The tensions above also come as the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) prepares to launch its largest ever exercise on Sunday called "[Chariots of Fire](#)." The four-week long exercise will simulate war on multiple fronts, including with Gaza and Hezbollah. Lebanon-based Hezbollah has raised its alert level as a result of the exercise. Hezbollah leaders reportedly fear that the maneuvers could be used as a smoke-screen to launch an attack, and have deployed additional forces in both Lebanon’s south and in Syria, where the terror group also operates.

### **Backdrop and Causes**

#### **THE CALENDAR**

The current clashes come at a moment when an unusually large number of occasions are all coinciding due to the differences in the Muslim, Jewish and Gregorian calendars. (Some have described this week as a “perfect storm brewing.”) Many of these events mark a time of heightened sensitivity among both Muslim and Jewish worshippers.

- May 7, when the main rioting began, was the last Friday of Ramadan, and tens of thousands gathered on the Temple Mount for prayers.
- Saturday night was known as Laylat al-Qadr, which marks the day in Islam in which it is believed that the Quran was first sent to the world from Heaven.
- Tonight (Sunday), Yom Yerushalaim begins according to the Jewish calendar. This day marks 54 years since the city’s reunification under Israeli rule and is usually celebrated with tens of

thousands of Jewish worshippers parading with flags through the Old City and ending at the Western Wall.

- This Wednesday will mark Eid El Fitr, a major Muslim holiday marking the end of Ramadan.
- Also, coming later in the week, is May 14, which is known by Palestinians as Nakba (Catastrophe) Day, which is the anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel in the civil calendar.
- Finally, International Quds Day is an annual event held at the end of Ramadan that was initiated by the Iranian regime in 1979 to express support for the Palestinians and to oppose Zionism and Israel.

#### OTHER CAUSES OF CURRENT TENSION

- Israeli yeshiva student [Yehuda Guetta](#) z”l, who was shot in a terror attack at Tzomet Tapuach last week, died of his wounds on Wednesday night. The IDF has now arrested a suspect in his killing.
- Israel’s Supreme Court has ruled in favor of two Jewish non-profit groups claiming ownership of homes in the predominantly Arab, Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. The decision could potentially lead to the eviction of the Arab families currently living in the building, (around 70 people in total). For more information and detailed background, see [here](#).
- Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas last week announced that he was cancelling the long awaited Palestinian elections, blaming Israel for not allowing polling stations to be set up in Jerusalem. Elections for the Palestinian presidency have been cancelled on numerous occasions, and were last held in 2005.
- Political uncertainty in Israel has also led to instability. Many Palestinians are nervous about the prospect of Naftali Bennett, a long time Israeli hawk, becoming prime minister.

#### International Reactions

- The United States’ State Department spokesperson Ned Price [urged both sides](#) to “exercise decisive leadership and work cooperatively together to lower tensions.”
- The EU’s senior diplomat, Josep Borrell, called for a de-escalation in tensions, saying “Violence and incitement are unacceptable and the perpetrators on all sides must be held accountable.”
- The UAE, which normalized relations with Israel last year, “strongly condemned” the clashes and the potential Sheikh Jarrah evictions. UAE’s Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Khalifa al-Marar, urged Israeli authorities to reduce tensions.
- Hamas has threatened to attack Israel if the eviction of from Sheikh Jarrah goes ahead.

JFNA’s Israel office is keeping a close watch on events on the ground, and will keep you apprised of developments.

*For more information, please contact JFNA’s [Dani Wassner](#), Director of Israeli Government Relations.*

*Sources: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Yisrael Hayom, N12 Israel News, The Times of Israel, Galei Tzahal Radio, The Jerusalem Post, IDF Spokesperson, Ynet, i24 News.*