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## What's really been happening at the al-Aqsa Compound?



Explosion near Khan Younis, Gaza, in the early hours of Tuesday, 19th April 2022

Palestine is teetering once again on the edge of 'war', or, more accurately, awaiting another escalation in the current round of collective punishment being meted out by Israel's bloated military machine. On Monday evening a rocket was fired from Gaza in protest at the incursion by Israeli forces and religious extremists into the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. This rocket, fired at southern Israel, was intercepted by the Iron Dome air defence system. In response, in the early hours of Tuesday 19th April Israel bombed a target west of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip.

Events are eerily retracing the template laid down last May: an Israeli government in crisis; rising tensions due to demolitions and land expropriations in East Jerusalem; violent dispersal of Ramadan gatherings near the Damascus Gate; military incursions into cities in the West Bank; provocative attacks on people worshipping at Al-Aqsa .....

Since the beginning of 2022 the Israeli military has killed more than 47 Palestinians, including eight children and two women, five times the number they killed in the same period last year. Israeli forces have killed 17 people since the beginning of Ramadan (April 2nd). Between the 22nd March and the 7th April 12 Israelis and two Ukrainians living in Israel were killed by Palestinians in four separate incidents.

This edition of the Highland - Palestine Newsletter focuses on two aspects of the current situation: the ongoing events at the Haram al-Sharif; the reverberations of events that took place twenty years ago this month - the Battle of Jenin.

## What's really been happening at the Al-Aqsa compound



At 5.30 am on Friday 15th April Israeli riot police stormed the Al-Aqsa mosque compound and began a violent assault on the thousands of Palestinians gathered for prayers on the second Friday of Ramadan. Hours later, the compound had been 'cleared'; 470 people had been arrested and 152 were in hospital. Eight people were in intensive care.



The Israeli forces stormed the courtyards of the Haram al-Sharif in a well-planned and coordinated operation, aimed at exerting temporary Israeli military control of the area, contrary to the terms of the so-called 'status quo' agreement, which places control of the site in the hands of the Islamic Waqf, the Islamic trust that has governed access to the compound for centuries, and is currently sponsored jointly by Jordan and the Palestinian Authority.



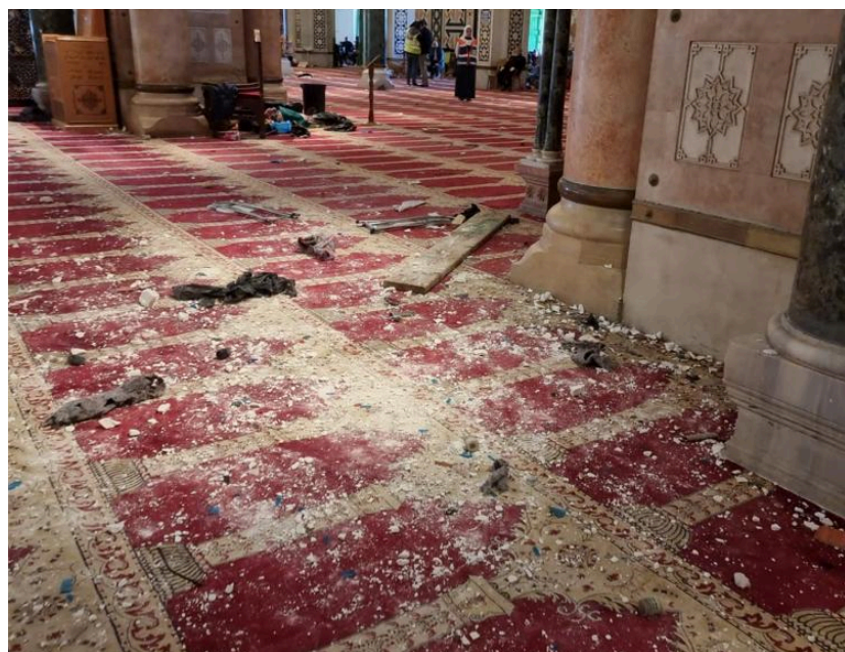
Over the course of the operation the Israeli forces attacked hundreds of worshippers with batons and rubber bullets. 'They beat everyone. - journalists, medics, elderly women - everyone that was in their way. They didn't spare anyone.' Elderly men and women, and even a man on crutches, were beaten to the ground. One of the Palestinian guards at the site was shot in the eye with a rubber bullet.



One Palestinian journalist, identified as Nasreen Salem, was reportedly injured after she was hit in the head with a rubber bullet. Palestinian photojournalist Rami al-Khatib was filmed being targeted and brutalized by a group of armed soldiers in the compound.



Having driven crowds of worshippers from the main esplanade, the riot police entered the mosque area, climbed the roof of the Qibli prayer hall – the main building on the site, where congregational prayers are led - and, having smashed a number of stained glass windows, set up sniper positions, before proceeding to use stun grenades, rubber-coated steel bullets and tear gas on the crowd inside.

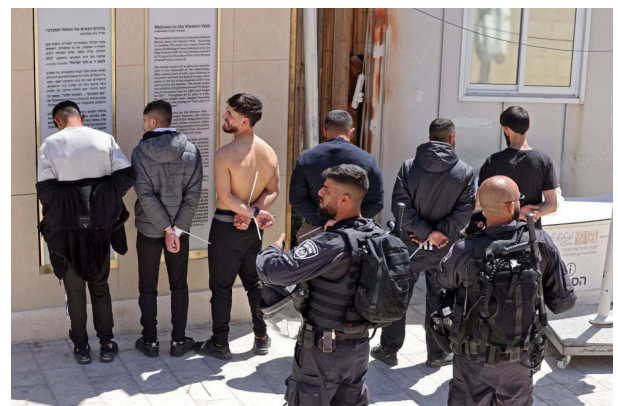




According to the [BBC](#), 'Israeli police said officers entered the site after coming under attack with fireworks, stones and other objects.' But then, they would say that wouldn't they? In reality, the Israeli special forces had been drafted in over night for the specific purpose of expelling or arresting hundreds of young Palestinians who had assembled to defend the site against planned incursions by Israeli Jewish religious extremists. The Israeli forces provoked the very response they claim to have been attempting to prevent.



**Young Palestinians engaged Israeli forces as they attempted to drive them out of the Qibli prayer hall. Almost 500 were arrested.**



The 'status quo' agreement specifically forbids non-Muslim visitors to the Haram al-Sharif from performing any form of religious ritual at the site, including the saying of prayers. The Haram al-Sharif is reserved for Muslim observances while the Western Wall is reserved for Jewish worship. Over recent years, this agreement has been tested to its limit by members of the 'Temple Mount Movement' whose aim is to reclaim the site for their version of Judaism and to build a third temple on the ruins of the al-Aqsa mosque. Led by such figures as Gershon Salomon and Yehuda Glick, and supported by right-wing politicians



such as MK Ben Gvir, more and more religious Zionists have forced their way onto the mount, provoking a long series of increasingly violent confrontations. Theologically questionable, and controversial within Judaism itself, the 'Temple Mount' movement has politicised religion in the service of a supremacist ideology.



**Yehuda Glick on a visit to the 'Temple Mount'**

Earlier in the week, the group *Hozrim Lahar* (*Return to the Mount*) had advertised a reward for anyone who could successfully sacrifice a Passover lamb on the 'Temple Mount'. According to the Jerusalem Post, 'The flyer promises NIS 400 for being arrested, NIS 800 for being arrested with a lamb, and NIS 10,000 if a lamb is successfully sacrificed.' 11 Jewish Israelis have now been arrested on suspicion of planning to sacrifice a goat on the 'Temple Mount'. On Friday, Israeli Police detained two Jewish men who were on their way to ritually slaughter a kid goat. Three goats have been confiscated.



**A second violent incursion by Israeli forces took place on the morning of Sunday 17th April.** This time, the aim was to clear the site for the visit of 'Temple Mount' activists, including the wife of MK Ben Gvir, who toured the site shouting 'Nakba, Nakba' and 'Abu Khdair!', a reference to the Palestinian child Mohammad Abu Khdair who was kidnapped, burned, and killed by Zionist settlers in 2014.



Middle East Eye has reported that, 'At around 7am local time, hundreds of special forces entered the mosque's courtyard and began striking Palestinians observing Ramadan with batons in a bid to force them out. There were also reports of stun grenades being deployed.'

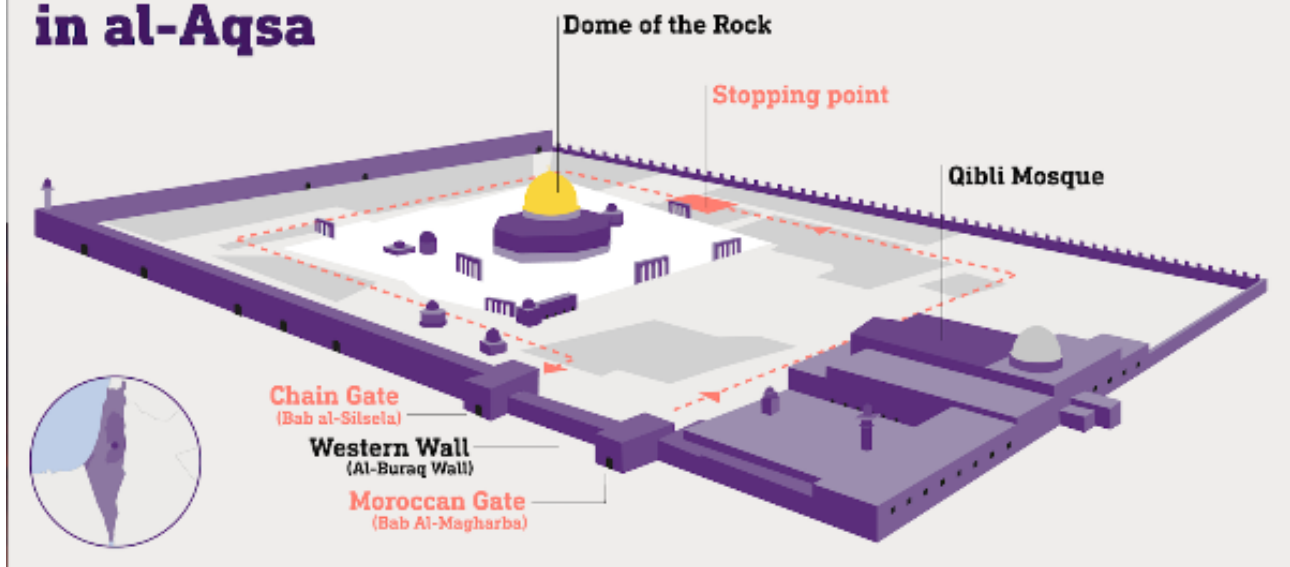
In the silver-domed Qibli prayer hall, Israeli forces fired teargas at worshippers and blocked them indoors. For more than three hours, dozens of people trapped inside have not been able to evacuate people who sustained minor injuries.'

According to Haaretz, 'The Palestinian Red Crescent reported that 17 were wounded in clashes near Lion's Gate in the Old City, and that five were taken to the hospital. Meanwhile, police are allowing Jews to enter the compound in groups, and dozens continue to wait at Mughrabi Gate in the Old City. The most recent reports said 728 Jewish visitors had entered the site Sunday.'

The Jordanian Foreign Ministry said in response, 'Israel's measures to change the status quo on the Mount are a dangerous escalation. Israel bears full responsibility for the consequences of the current escalation that is thwarting efforts invested to bring about calm. The Israel Police have no right to organize visits by non-Muslims there. Only the Muslim Waqf does.'



## Route of Israeli incursions in al-Aqsa



This recent [article](#) by Joseph Massad provides a very clear summary of the antecedents of the current situation: [How Zionism is fuelling a religious war over al-Aqsa Mosque](#)

Middle East Eye has also published a useful background briefing: [Al-Aqsa Mosque: Israeli raids and incursions explained](#)

For an insightful discussion of the political implications of these recent events, please listen to the [This is Palestine](#) podcast with Omar Baddar and Diana Buttu