

**Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

## Israeli police clash with worshippers at Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque

Exchange of fire between Israel and Gaza militants follows violent scenes at flashpoint site



Israeli security forces remove Palestinian Muslim worshippers sitting on the grounds of the al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem  
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**James Shotter** in Jerusalem AN HOUR AGO

Israeli police clashed with Palestinian worshippers in Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque in the early hours of Wednesday, drawing a furious response from the Arab world.

The violence, which erupted as Muslims celebrated the holy month of Ramadan, and ahead of the Jewish Passover festival, was followed by an exchange of fire between Israel and Gaza, with Israeli forces bombing sites in the blockaded coastal strip after militants fired 10 rockets at Israel.

Israel's military said four of the rockets launched from Gaza had been intercepted, five fell on empty terrain and one landed near a factory. No injuries were reported as a result of the exchange.

The hilltop al-Aqsa compound, known to Jews as the Temple Mount, is the third holiest site in Islam and the holiest in Judaism, and one of the most sensitive places in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Clashes there have touched off broader conflagrations in the past, including an 11-day war between Israel and militants in Gaza two years ago.

Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan all condemned the entrance of Israeli forces into the mosque, with Riyadh denouncing it as a "blatant storming" and Cairo branding it a

“dangerous escalation” that would undermine international efforts to calm [Israeli-Palestinian tensions](#). The Arab League called an emergency meeting for later on Wednesday.

Wednesday’s violence began after Israeli police attempted to forcibly remove Palestinians who had barricaded themselves inside the mosque overnight to pray.

Police said they had arrested 350 people who had been hurling fireworks and stones, after “many continuous attempts to remove the individuals from the mosque using dialogue failed”.

Israel’s national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, an ultranationalist previously convicted of incitement to racism and support for a terrorist organisation, praised the police for their response, and demanded a tougher Israeli reaction to the rockets fired from Gaza.

Palestinian prime minister Mohammad Shtayyeh accused Israel of committing a “major crime against worshippers”. “Praying in the al-Aqsa Mosque is not [something we do] with the permission of the occupation, but rather it is our right,” he said.

Footage on social media appeared to show fireworks exploding in the mosque, and armed police beating people with batons and rifle butts. Other pictures of the aftermath showed overturned furniture and belongings strewn across the floor. The Palestinian Red Crescent said 12 people had been injured in the clashes, with three taken to hospital for treatment.

The clashes in Jerusalem come amid a surge in violence in the occupied West Bank, sparking fears that the long-simmering Israeli-Palestinian conflict could be on the verge of a broader escalation.

In the past year, Israeli forces have killed more than 250 Palestinians in the West Bank, while Palestinians have killed more than 40 Israelis.

Israel has occupied both the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including the Old City where the al-Aqsa compound is located, since 1967.

Under the so-called status quo agreement, both Muslims and non-Muslims can visit the site, but only Muslims are allowed to pray there. However, in recent years Jewish groups have begun to pray at the site, stoking fears among Muslims that the status quo is being undermined.

In recent weeks those fears have been exacerbated by calls from Jewish

ultranationalists to carry out the ritual slaughter of a goat in the compound on the feast of Passover, in a revival of an ancient practice.

Israel prohibits such sacrifices, and in recent days, the police have arrested and questioned people who had called for goats to be brought to the site. Police said on Wednesday morning that “there is no change in the existing conduct at the Temple Mount and the holy places”.

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