Overview

Since the beginning of the Muslim religious month of Ramadan on April 13, 2021, tensions between Palestinians, the Israeli security forces and right wing Israeli activists have risen in east Jerusalem. In a number of instances young Arabs attacked Jewish passersby. The tension in Jerusalem spread to the Gaza Strip, and 41 rockets were fired at the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip (36 on April 23, 2021, two on April 24, 2021, and three on April 25, 2021). Ten rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system and 31 rockets fell in open areas.

The rocket fire was preceded by formal announcements from most of the Palestinian organizations in the Gaza Strip expressing solidarity with the residents of east Jerusalem in their struggle against Israel ("the occupation") and an announcement with a warning from the joint operations room of 15 organizations obedient to Hamas. Unlike previous rounds of rocket fire during recent months, two of the organizations in the joint operations room claimed collective responsibility. The IDF responded with artillery fire and air strikes on Hamas terrorist targets, regarding Hamas as responsible for what happens in the Gaza Strip, and by limiting the fishing zone off the Gaza shore. Senior Palestinian Authority (PA) figures and media encouraged the Palestinian public to hold demonstrations and clash with the Israeli security forces "to defend Jerusalem."

There were a number of causes behind the tensions in east Jerusalem:

- **Palestinians speakers**, who exploited the month of Ramadan to repeat the false claim that Israel was trying to keep Palestinians away from al-Aqsa mosque, proof of which was Israel's putting barriers in front of the steps near the Damascus Gate, where young Palestinians customarily sit. The ban on sitting on the steps enraged the Palestinians and thus from the beginning of the month the central plaza became a center for riots and clashes between Palestinians and police. On April 25, 2021, the police allowed the barriers near the steps to be removed, which was perceived by the Palestinians as a victory.
Several Palestinian videos were uploaded to Tik Tok showing young Palestinians attacking Jews, primarily ultra-Orthodox, in Jerusalem. In response to the videos several Arabs in Jerusalem were attacked by Israelis. On April 22, 2021, the events led to a mass demonstration of far-right activists which was held near the Damascus Gate.

The upcoming elections in the PA for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), and the questions of whether or not Israel will allow them to be held in east Jerusalem and whether Mahmoud Abbas will use Israel’s banning them in Jerusalem as an excuse to postpone them are also a cause of tension. That is in addition to Hamas’ growing strength which could increase its chances of winning the election, and its frustration that the elections might be postponed.

Tension has also been heightened by the Israeli Supreme Court’s ruling to evict several dozen Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood.

In recent years the Palestinian public’s enthusiasm to participate in demonstrations, nationalist events and clashes with the Israeli security forces has waned. Recent events indicate that while the public is uninterested in such activities, they are still united around the issue of Jerusalem. It resonates with the entire public, ignites the situation on the ground and causes security-related tensions which also spread to the Gaza Strip.

Regarding the rocket fire into Israeli territory, apparently Hamas wants to impose new terms of engagement in which every activity which is interpreted as an attempt to interfere in east Jerusalem or al-Aqsa mosque is responded to with rocket fire attacking the south of Israel. Even if Hamas military-terrorist operatives did not participate in the rocket fire, massive rocket fire would not have been carried out without authorization from Hamas, or at least without its turning a blind eye.

For Hamas as well, which in recent times has worked to bring about calm, the issue of Jerusalem is important to the point where it is willing to fire rockets even at the cost of a significant Israeli response. Moreover, being seen by the Palestinian public as a defender of al-Aqsa mosque side by side with the Palestinians in east Jerusalem allows Hamas to make points in the Palestinian arena, especially before the PLC elections. In point of fact, during the demonstrations in east Jerusalem and in a number of cities in Judea and Samaria people carried green Hamas flags and shouted slogans for Hamas and Muhammad Deif, the commander of Hamas’ military-terrorist wing.
Most of the events focused on east Jerusalem. However, tensions are still running high and there is a significant chance more riots will be held in the coming days, including the spread of clashes to other cities in Judea and Samaria. In addition May 9, 2021, Jerusalem Day will be marked, as it is every year in east Jerusalem, and could be another reason for friction and rioting.

Confrontations in Jerusalem and the Cities in Judea and Samaria

Since April 13, 2021, the first day of the Muslim religious month of Ramadan, there have been tensions in east Jerusalem because of the Israeli police force's decision to erect barriers near the Damascus Gate plaza and steps, where mass gatherings are held during the month. Palestinians went to the area near the gate every evening to throw rocks, detonators and Molotov cocktails at the Israeli police and Border Police forces, and to attack Israeli passersby, especially the ultra-Orthodox.

The tension was increased by videos uploaded by Palestinians to Tik Tok showing young Palestinians attacking ultra-Orthodox Jews. In response to the videos a number of Palestinians were attacked by Israelis.

The events peaked on April 22, 2021, when in response to the events a large, violent demonstration was held near the Damascus Gate by activists from a far-right Israeli organization called Lehava. Hundreds of the organization's members marched to the Gate and tried to break through the police barriers. The police used riot control measures to disperse them. On the other side of the street the police confronted hundreds of Palestinians who had come to the site of the demonstration. They threw rocks and Molotov cocktails, shot fireworks and attacked the police. Hundreds more Palestinians gathered in the alleys of the Old City chanting "With our souls and blood we will redeem al-Aqsa." Several dozen Palestinians were detained by the security forces. According to the Palestinian Red Crescent dozens more were injured (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, Israeli media, April 22, 2021).
Palestinians on their way to the Damascus Gate to confront rightist demonstrators (QudsN Facebook page, April 22, 2021).

In the late evening of April 23, 2021, the second Friday of Ramadan, the riots in Jerusalem were renewed. One of the focal points was the Qalandia Checkpoint where hundreds of Palestinian rioted, burned tires, threw rocks, shot fireworks and clashed with Border Police forces. Another focal point was Salah al-Din Street in east Jerusalem, where dozens of Palestinians attacked the district courthouse compound (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, Jerusalem, and Israeli media, April 23, 2021).

In the meantime, there were riots in other locations in Judea and Samaria, including al-Bireh, Tulkarm, Bethlehem, Nablus and the Tomb of Rachel. At some of the demonstrations held in Judea and Samaria demonstrators carried Hamas flags. Hamas-affiliated Palestinians boasted on the social media that during the demonstrations young Palestinians in Judea and Samaria shouted praise for Muhammad Deif, the commander of Hamas' military-terrorist wing, and Abu Obeida, its spokesman. One of the notices posted to the social media had the caption, "We are the men of Muhammad Deif."

Notice posted by Twitter users praising Muhammad Deif (Facebook page of Marwa Arnawat, April 24, 2021).
On the evening of April 24, 2021, the riots at the Damascus Gate were renewed and in the neighborhoods of Issawiya and a-Tor. Palestinians clashed with police and threw rocks at cars that drove by (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, April 24, 2021).

Right: Demonstrators face Israel security forces near the Damascus Gate. Left: A young Palestinian climbs a pole to vandalize an Israeli police security camera (Palinfo Twitter account, April 24, 2021).

A burned-out Israeli vehicle in the a-Tor neighborhood in east Jerusalem (Palinfo Twitter account, April 24, 2021). Left: Riot at the Qalandia Crossing (QudsN Facebook page, April 23, 2021).

Riots in the center of Hebron (Wafa, April 25, 2021).
On the evening of April 25, 2021, the police announced the removal of the barriers erected in the Damascus Gate plaza, perceived by the Palestinians as a victory.

**Marshalling Forces in the Gaza Strip**

**Threats from the Palestinian terrorist organizations**

In view of the violence in Jerusalem on Friday, April 23, 2021, the Palestinian organizations in the Gaza Strip, led by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), issued threats to Israel hinting that a response would come from the direction of Gaza. Hamas’ military-terrorist wing told Israel not to test its patience, because they would defend Jerusalem with their blood and souls and “upturn the table and reshuffle the cards.” In an appeal to young Palestinians and especially those in east Jerusalem, Hamas said the spark they had ignited in east Jerusalem would lead to an explosion that would blow up in Israel’s face (“the criminal enemy”), telling them that “you will find your battalions and resistance in the heart of the battle. We will teach the enemy unprecedentedly hard lessons” (al-Mayadeen, April 23, 2021).

Khaled al-Batash, a member of the PIJ’s political bureau, expressed solidarity with the residents of east Jerusalem, saying "we are with you with our weapons with rockets and with our blood," adding that [the PIJ] would defend the land, the people and the holy sites (Shams News, April 24, 2021).

The military-terrorist wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) warned Israel not to continue attacking the Palestinians. It said it was running out of patience and that "the occupation and settlers will pay the price" (RT in Arabic, April 24, 2021).

On the evening of April 24, 2021, the joint operations room in the Gaza Strip said in a statement that they would not be silent in the face of the "unbridled aggression" against
the Palestinian people in east Jerusalem, and promised to remain at the center of the battle for Jerusalem and al-Aqsa mosque. "The enemy, with his aggression, has opened the gates of hell on himself and we will have the final word to deter the enemy. An attack on our capital, our people and our holy sites is a red line and there will be serious consequences and a heavy price to pay if Israel crosses it" (al-Alam in Arabic, April 24, 2021).

**Rocket fire**

Approximately two hours after the joint operations room issued its statement, the Palestinian terrorist organizations escalated the events in east Jerusalem by firing rockets at the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip. Initially three rockets were fired. One was intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system and two fell in an open area near the border security fence. In response IDF forces fired tank shells at two Hamas observation posts in the Khan Yunis and al-Bureij regions. A short time later a barrage of at least six rockets was fired, and after that several more.

According to the IDF spokesman, on April 23 and 24, 2021, 38 rockets were fired throughout the night and before dawn the next morning. Six rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome and the others landed in open areas (IDF spokesman, April 24, 2021).

In response to the rocket fire IDF aircraft carried out a series of attacks on terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip. Among them were Hamas underground facilities and rocket launchers (IDF spokesman, April 24, 2021).
An analysis of the rocket fire carried out on the night of April 23, 2021 indicates it was probably orchestrated and possibly by Hamas, even if Hamas terrorist operatives did not actively participate. The rockets were fired according to a schedule and targeted several areas, with care taken not to extend the rocket fire beyond the communities near the border. As opposed to previous recent rocket fire attacks, two organizations claimed responsibility: the al-Aqsa Brigades faction, which belongs to a Fatah faction in the Gaza Strip, and the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades, the PFLP’s military-terrorist wing. Both organizations belong to the joint operations room, that is, the rocket fire was carried out with permission from Hamas, and possibly with instructions not to fire rockets beyond the immediate area.

Additional rocket fire

On the evening of Saturday, April 24, 2021, after about 24 hours of relative quiet, as tempers flared in east Jerusalem, rocket fire from the Gaza Strip was renewed. At 21:00 a rocket was fired and intercepted by the Iron Dome in the region of the southern Israeli town of Sderot. At 22:30 a rocket exploded in an open area near the border security fence in the western Negev. Shortly before midnight a mortar shell was fired but the launch attempt failed (IDF spokesman, April 24, 2021). The IDF did not respond the attempted mortar fire. Two Israelis were evacuated to a hospital, a woman who had an anxiety attack and a young man who was injured while running to a shelter.

Rocket fire continued on April 25, 2021. Three rockets were fired during the night, two intercepted by the Iron Dome and the third falling in an open area. Four civilians were evacuated to a hospital after being injured while running to a shelter. In response to the rocket fire the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) reduced the fishing zone off the Gaza Strip coast from 15 miles to nine.
Demonstrations of solidarity

After the first barrage of rocket fire, Gazans held marches in the streets to show solidarity with the residents of Jerusalem. The marches were widely covered by the Palestinian social media. In Beit Hanoun, in the northern Gaza Strip, Hamas held a demonstration where signs were held reading "Jerusalem rises in rebellion." In Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip demonstrators burned Israeli flags and pictures of Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz (Palinfo Twitter account, April 24, 2021). In the eastern part of Gaza City Hamas held a mass demonstration to show solidarity, where participants called on Hamas' military-terrorist wing to continue firing rockets at Israel. At the same time several hundred Palestinians rioted at the border near the Karni Crossing. They burned tires and threw

Right: Rally in support of rocket fire, Beit Hanoun, northern Gaza Strip. The sign reads, "Jerusalem rises in rebellion." Left: Rally in support of rocket fire in the al-Bureij refugee camp, central Gaza Strip (Palinfo Twitter account, April 24, 2021).

Demonstrators in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip burn Israeli flags and pictures of Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz (Palinfo Twitter account, April 24, 2021).

International actors, especially Egypt and the UN, tried to mediate to calm the situation. "Sources involved in the contacts" reported that the organizations told Egypt they did not want an escalation but that Israel had to stop what was happening in Jerusalem (Israeli TV Channel Kan 11, April 24, 2021).
Palestinian Reactions

The Palestinian social media blamed Israel, condemned the actions of the Israeli security forces and praised the Palestinians for their "firm stance."

- **Mahmoud Abbas' office** issued a formal announcement stating the Israeli government bore full responsibility for the dangerous deterioration in east Jerusalem and called on the international community to defend the Palestinian people in Jerusalem from the oppression of the settlers and their "evil attacks." According to the announcement, the settlers and far-right organizations incited the killing of Arabs under the protection of the Israeli army and police (Mahmoud Abbas' Facebook page, April 22, 2021).

- **A Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** said the PA condemned "organized political terrorism" against the residents and holy sites of east Jerusalem. He said they praised the courage and bravery of the Palestinian people who stood against the occupation and settlers (Muhammad Shtayyeh's Facebook page, April 22, 2021).

- **Hussein al-Sheikh**, a member of Fatah's Central Committee, said that what was happening in east Jerusalem was the Palestinians' "heroic response" and the real battle for the defense of Jerusalem and the holy sites, and the struggle for sovereignty and the eternal capital (Hussein al-Sheikh's Twitter account, April 22, 2021).

- **Tawfiq al-Tirawi**, a member of Fatah's Central Committee, condemned Israel's actions against the residents of east Jerusalem and the support Israel gave the settlers. He expressed esteem and support for the stance of the residents of east Jerusalem against Israeli actions, fighting, he said, a "sacred battle" for the sake of Jerusalem and al-Aqsa mosque, which is the personal duty of every [Muslim] person (Tawfiq al-Tirawi’s Facebook page, April 24, 2021).

- **Taysir Nasrallah**, a member of Fatah's Revolutionary Council, said the threats and provocative measures of Israel and the settlers against the residents of east Jerusalem were what had caused the situation to boil over. He claimed the measures taken by the Palestinians were part of "the natural response of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian leadership," especially because it was Ramadan, a month during which thousands of Palestinians went to al-Aqsa mosque to pray. He also said that the
clashes were also the result of Israel's refusal to allow elections to be held in east Jerusalem (al-Ghad, April 25, 2021).

Ekrima Sabri, who delivers the sermons in al-Aqsa mosque, quoted by a Hamas-controlled newspaper, said the attacks of Israel ("the regime of the occupation") and the settlers against al-Aqsa mosque and their behavior towards the Arabs who prayed there would lead to "a genuine explosion in the city," and that given what was happening, continued attack of the settlers and the "army of the occupation," anything was possible. He said the area of the Damascus Gate, the Herod’s Gate and Salah al-Din Street were important areas in Jerusalem and therefore the largest-scale clashes occurred there because Israel aspired to control them (al-Risalah, April 23, 2021). On another occasion he called for a committee of young Palestinians to be appointed to defend the city. He stressed the need to remain on high alert to counter all possible aggression in the coming days (Dunia al-Watan, April 24, 2021).

Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, said Jerusalem would not surrender to the occupation and its fascist policies (al-Quds al-Arabi, April 23, 2021). Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said all [Israel's alleged] crimes and violations would not deter the Palestinian people from continuing along the path of "resistance" [i.e., terrorism and violence] to defend Jerusalem and al-Aqsa mosque, and the Palestinians’ rights and liberty, regardless of the cost. He said all the actions carried out by the "Palestinian resistance" were in response to Israel's aggression and part of the national duty to defend the interests of the Palestinian people and break the equation of Israel, which was responsible for all the consequences and outcome of the continued escalation (Palinfo Twitter account, April 24, 2021).

The Hamas movement in east Jerusalem called on the Palestinian public to continue gathering in east Jerusalem and to go en masse to the Temple Mount, and to continue their "harassment" near the settlements. He also called on the "resistance" to keep its finger on the trigger (QudsN Facebook page, April 25, 2021).

The PIJ said the unity of the Palestinian people would make Israel's plans for aggression fail. He said al-Aqsa mosque was a red line, and the residents of east Jerusalem, and behind them the Palestinian people, would not let groups of settlers desecrate it. He added that Israel's attacks on the Gaza Strip would not deter the "resistance" from fulfilling its duties as necessary, and that everything done by the "Palestinian resistance" was in
response to [Israel's alleged] aggression and part of the national commitment and deployment to defend the interests of the Palestinian people (al-Andalou News, April 24, 2021).

The PFLP called for a joint leadership to escalate a comprehensive intifada and increase clashes with Israel (QudsN Facebook page, April 25, 2021).

![Image](image.jpg)


The Palestinian media

The events in east Jerusalem made headlines in all the Palestinian media. The news agencies played up the narrative of "Palestinian heroism" and described the riots in Jerusalem as a struggle for liberation and freedom. The rocket fire targeting the Israeli community near the Gaza Strip was also represented favorably. The Palestinian media published articles, videos, drawings and notices to ignite emotions and encourage Palestinians to clash with the Israeli security forces, using the hashtag "#Jerusalem rises in rebellion." Encouragement was also heard in the Gaza Strip for the Palestinian groundswell in east Jerusalem. The website of Hezbollah-affiliated al-Mayadeen in Lebanon also used the hashtag.

Al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, the Palestinian daily newspaper and official PA organ, devoted its front pages to covering the riots in east Jerusalem with blood-red headlines, which included encouragement and incitement for continuing the violence. The main headline of the April 24, 2021, edition of the paper read "Palestine defends its capital. The residents of Jerusalem, like an olive tree, continue their firm stance and challenge." Also in large type were remarks by PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh, who praised the "heroism and firm stance of the residents of east Jerusalem against Israel (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, April 24, 2021). The headline of the April 25, 2021, edition read "The occupation turned Jerusalem into a military camp (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, April 25, 2021).
Ahmed Rafiq, who writes editorials for Hamas' newspaper al-Risalah, wrote that while Israel was trying to avoid a military confrontation with the Gaza Strip and making concessions to the [Palestinian terrorist] organizations in a bid for calm, the Gaza Strip did not dawdle when it came to standing shoulder to shoulder with the residents of east Jerusalem. He said that worried Israel and caused it to be concerned over a slide into a military confrontation which it did not want at the present time. In his opinion the Palestinian response of firing rockets surprised Israel because Israel relied on the political conditions of the Palestinian arena, including the PLC elections and the coronavirus epidemic (al-Risalah, April 24, 2021).

On the other hand, voices were heard in the Gaza Strip complaining that it was unnecessary to cause the situation to deteriorate to military confrontation, and that
there was no point in firing rockets because it drew attention away from what was happening in east Jerusalem and what Israel was doing. The same voices claimed that non-violent political action was what would give the Palestinians legitimacy and cause international and regional public opinion to be focused in favor of the Palestinian cause, like the affair of putting metal detectors at the entrance to al-Aqsa mosque several years ago, or like the return marches in the Gaza Strip.

**International reactions**

- Ayman Safadi, the Jordanian foreign minister, condemned the "racist aggression" in the Old City and Jerusalem and warned of its consequences. He said Jerusalem was a red line and that [Israel] was "playing with fire" (Ayman Safadi's Twitter account, April 23, 2021).

- Faisal al-Fayiz, the speaker of the Jordanian parliament, also condemned Israel. He said Israel's actions and the attacks of groups of settlers on the residents of east Jerusalem, against Jerusalem itself and the holy sites of the Muslims and Christians, would not weaken to strong stance of the Palestinian people.

- Egypt also condemned the events. The Egyptian foreign ministry said in a statement that Egypt condemned the violent actions and incitement of groups of extremist Jews who attacked their Palestinian brothers, the residents of the Old City of Jerusalem, who had wounded dozens of Palestinian civilians. Egypt said the Israeli authorities were responsible according to international law, which required them to provide the necessary protection to Palestinian civilians and to stop anything that might violate the rights of Palestinians who wanted to pray freely in al-Aqsa mosque (al-Andalou News, April 24, 2021).

- Tor Wennesland, special UN envoy to the Middle East peace process, said he was worried by the escalation in Jerusalem and Gaza. He said the provocation in Jerusalem had to stop, as did the rocket launchings by "armed groups." Indiscriminate rocket fire at Israeli population centers was, he said, a violation of international law. He condemned all violent action and called on all sides to restrain themselves and avoid another escalation, especially during Ramadan and times which were politically charged for everyone (Reuters, April 24, 2021).

- Peter Stano, EU spokesman, called on all sides to show restraint. He said the EU was very worried by the violent clashes in Jerusalem. He called for calm and an immediate defusing of the tension, for restraint and responsibility from everyone during such a sensitive time,
Jalina Porter, spokesperson for the American Department of State, said during a news briefing that the United States was worried by the escalation in Jerusalem and the clashes in the Old City. She said, "We'll call on the authorities in Jerusalem to take all appropriate steps to – not only to de-escalate the tensions, but also ensure the safety, security, as well as the rights of all of Jerusalem’s residents, as well as call on voices to urge calm and unity..." (Department of State website, April 23, 2021).