Overview

- Over the past few days, there has been an increase in the intensity of the violent clashes between Israeli police and Palestinians in East Jerusalem that began in the beginning of the month of Ramadan. The epicenter of the conflict is the Al-Aqsa Mosque. There have also been clashes at the Damascus Gate, the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, Issawiya and additional neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. The incidents also led to a flare-up in the Gaza Strip. Rockets were fired at Israel, incendiary balloons were launched, causing dozens of fires in the Gaza envelope area, and night harassment units were deployed along the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip.

- The height of the incidents was on May 10, 2021, Jerusalem Day in Israel, when thousands of Palestinians in the Al-Aqsa Mosque threw stones at the Mughrabi Gate. The Palestinians clashed with police in the area of the mosque. Hamas later launched massive rocket fire at Israel, including the Jerusalem region (see separate document).

- Israel, on its part, attempted to lower the high level of tension in East Jerusalem. The Attorney General has asked the Supreme Court to postpone the hearing on the petition of Sheikh Jarrah residents, which is expected to decide whether they will be evicted from their homes. The court assented to his request. The postponement of the hearing received extensive media coverage. Israel also banned Jews from visiting the Temple Mount on Jerusalem Day.

- Although the incidents are apparently spontaneous and not organized by any entity or group, there is ongoing incitement behind them by Palestinian organizations and especially Hamas, which encourage the Palestinian public to continue to clash with the Israeli security forces. It should be noted that during clashes in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, many Hamas flags were seen and many calls were made praising Mohammed Deif, head of the Hamas military wing, who also issued an unusual warning message to Israel.
It appears that the events in Jerusalem have once again placed the Palestinian issue in general and the issue of Jerusalem in particular on the agenda in the Arab and international arena. Many Islamic and Western Arab elements support the PA and criticize Israel’s actions. The PA is taking advantage of the incidents to convene international forums (the UN Security Council, the Arab League, etc.) to bring the issue back to the top of the agenda. It is also probable that they will take advantage of the incidents to bring them before the International Criminal Court in The Hague (ICC).

Incidents in East Jerusalem

The chain of events

Over the past few days, there has been a significant increase in the intensity of the violent clashes between police and Palestinians in East Jerusalem. The focal points of the clashes are mainly the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Damascus Gate and the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. The current wave of clashes began after the end of evening prayers on Friday, May 7, 2021, when Palestinians began throwing stones and objects at a police force in the Temple Mount compound. The police responded by firing stun grenades and sponge bullets at the rioters, who refused to leave the compound, and some of them barricaded themselves in one of the prayer halls. After several hours of clashes, the plaza of the Al-Aqsa compound was emptied and the gates were locked. Simultaneously, clashes broke out at the Damascus Gate and in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. According to the Palestinian Red Crescent, at least 200 Palestinians sustained wounds of varying degrees of severity. A total of 17 policemen were also injured.

The last Friday prayer of the month of Ramadan on the Temple Mount (Wafa, May 7, 2021)
Violent clashes on the Temple Mount after evening prayers at the site (PALINFO's Twitter account, May 8, 2021)

The next day, May 8, 2021 (Laylat al-Qadr), thousands of worshipers were supposed to come to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. To prevent the arrival of worshipers and the recurrence of the clashes, police set up roadblocks along the access roads to East Jerusalem. The roadblocks were later removed. About 80,000 Muslims took part in the Laylat al-Qadr prayer. At night, after the prayer passed relatively quietly, clashes resumed, mainly in the Damascus Gate area. Palestinians threw stones and objects at police and set off fireworks. Police responded through the use of demonstration dispersal measures and by firing stun grenades. According to the Red Crescent, 90 Palestinians were wounded. The clashes spread to other areas as well. According to Palestinian reports, over 60 Palestinians were wounded and at least eight of them were evacuated to hospitals.

Worshippers on Laylat al-Qadr on the Temple Mount (QUDSN Facebook page, May 9, 2021)
On May 9, 2021, the clashes in the Temple Mount plaza continued. One of the focal points of the incidents was near Hebrew University on Mount Scopus. Palestinian demonstrators from Issawiya rioted at the junction at the entrance to the university and clashed with police. Hundreds of students and lecturers were not permitted to leave the campus for several hours due to the incidents. Clashes also broke out in Sheikh Jarrah and the Damascus Gate area, lasting intermittently until nighttime.

On May 10, 2021, the date on which Jerusalem Day is celebrated in Israel, the clashes on the Temple Mount began in the early morning hours. This despite the fact that police forbade Jews from coming to the Temple Mount. Several thousand Muslims who had spent the night in the Al-Aqsa Mosque after making advance preparations (stockpiling stones, blocking doors and gates, sabotaging security cameras) began throwing stones at the Mughrabi Gate (near the Western Wall). In consequence, police entered the Al-Aqsa compound, the Palestinians threw rocks at them, and police responded by firing stun grenades. Loudspeakers were used throughout Al-Aqsa to encourage the rioters and call on
more residents to come and join the clashes. At around 12:00, police withdrew from the compound and deployed at the entrance to the Temple Mount and permitted worshipers to enter. The Palestinian Red Crescent reported several dozen wounded, four of them seriously. The riots spread to other sites in East Jerusalem.

Palestinian youths preparing for clashes with Israeli security forces on the Temple Mount
(PALINFO's Twitter account, May 10, 2021)

Clashes with Israeli security forces on the Temple Mount
(PALINFO's Twitter account, QUDSN Facebook Page, May 10, 2021)

The Gaza Strip

- In view of the tense situation, Hamas began to stir up the situation and incite the public in East Jerusalem to continue the activity. In this context, the Hamas military wing issued a (rare) official statement by Mohammed Deif, commander of the military wing, in which he threatened Israel. According to the statement, they are closely monitoring the incidents and warn Israel that they will not sit idly by in the face of what is happening and that "Israel will pay a heavy price" (website of the Hamas military wing, May 4, 2021). Hamas spokesman

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Hazem Qassem noted that Deif’s remarks represented the entire "Palestinian resistance" and the entire Palestinian people and that Jerusalem was a red line (Al-Ressala.net, May 5, 2021).

Abu Obeida, spokesman for the Hamas military wing, later sent a message to the residents of East Jerusalem to the effect that Mohammed Deif’s promise would not be broken.

- At the same time, a number of retaliation operations in support of the Palestinians in East Jerusalem began in the Gaza Strip:
  - **Rocket launches**: Between May 8-10, 2021, in the morning, three instances of rocket launches at Israel were identified (for the rocket launches that began on the afternoon of May 10, see separate document). A total of six rockets were launched, two of which were intercepted by the Iron Dome system, and the rest landed in open areas. Two more rockets that were fired landed in the Gaza Strip. Two people were lightly wounded while running to protected areas.
  - **The balloon launch units** called for general mobilization and resumption of their operations. Over the past few days, dozens of incendiary balloons have been launched, causing dozens of fires in the Gaza envelope, disrupting railway traffic, closing roads and damaging agriculture and wooded areas. Sources in Hamas said that the balloon launches were intended to heat up the border with Israel. They added that assuming the situation in Jerusalem deteriorates, the activity is expected to increase. They also noted the possibility of a resumption of rocket fire (Sawa, May 8, 2021).
A fire in the Gaza envelope caused by an incendiary balloon launched from Gaza
(Twitter account of MK Haim Yellin, May 9, 2021)

- The night harassment units began operating. They detonated IEDs and grenades at a number of sites near the security fence.

Activity of the night harassment units near the fence in the Gaza Strip
(QUDSN website, May 9, 2021)

- In several sites along the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel, near the security fence, there were demonstrations by residents. The Supreme Authority for the Return March announced that it would organize a series of protest activities and called on the Palestinian public to support the Palestinians in Jerusalem, go to the points of friction with Israel and clash with the Israeli security forces (Sawa, May 9, 2021).

Palestinians demonstrating in front of the security fence east of Al-Bureij and clashing with IDF forces (Ashraf Amara’s Twitter account, May 8 and 9, 2021)
In response to the incidents, the Coordinator of Government Operations in the Territories announced that after a series of security assessments, it was decided to close the fishing area in the Gaza Strip as of the morning of May 10, 2021. The Coordinator later announced the immediate closure of the Erez Crossing except for the entry and exit of humanitarian and exceptional cases (Al-Munasiq website, May 9 and 10, 2021).

In light of the escalation in the Gaza Strip, "Hamas sources" reported that secret talks were underway to restore calm and prevent escalation and that in the past few days, Egypt had mediated between Hamas and Israel in order to prevent a deterioration in the situation. According to the same sources, Egypt sent a message to Hamas from Israel to the effect that it was not interested in escalation and was working to calm the situation (Sawa, May 8, 2021). According to another report, Egypt is in contact with Israel and has demanded that it put an end to the escalation in Jerusalem and the eviction of the families from Sheikh Jarrah. Egypt warned that the current escalation could lead to another intifada. At the same time, Palestinian organizations have reportedly been asked to calm the region in order to prevent escalation (Al-Arabiya, May 9, 2021).

Palestinian responses

In light of the incidents, the PA is working with Muslim, Arab and international entities and has requested the immediate convening of international forums to discuss the situation. Palestinian Ambassador to Egypt Diab al-Louh reported that Mahmoud Abbas had instructed him to request an urgent session of the Arab League. The Arab League has announced that it will hold an emergency conference on May 10, 2021, which will deal with "Israeli crimes and violations against the holy sites of Islam and Christianity in Jerusalem, and
especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque,” as well as the issue of Sheikh Jarrah (Al-Quds al-Arabi, May 8, 2021).

- **PA Foreign Affairs Minister Riyad al-Maliki** said that Mahmoud Abbas had also requested an urgent session of the Human Rights Council and the Islamic Cooperation Organization (Wafa News Agency, May 8, 2021).

- **The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement** claiming that Israel was trying to deceive the world and world public opinion. According to the statement, while Israel is working to describe and market what has happened in East Jerusalem as a struggle between the city's residents and as a property dispute, Israeli government institutions and government ministries actually are behind the activity of the settlers' NPO and are providing full support, protection and sponsorship for the activity aimed at Judaizing Jerusalem (Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, May 9, 2021).

- **The Fatah movement** issued a statement to the effect that the battle in which the entire Palestinian public is taking part is a battle for national identity and sovereignty. The statement also warned the Israeli government against continued aggression against the Palestinians. Fatah also thanked the Arab states for objecting to Israel's steps to Judaize Jerusalem and called on the international community to exert pressure on Israel (Wafa News Agency, May 8, 2021). The Fatah Central Committee, in an attempt to maintain a united front with Hamas, issued a belligerent statement emphasizing the need to continue the public struggle in Jerusalem and the escalation against Israel, noting that Jerusalem is a "conflict zone" with Israel. The Committee also said that the continued aggression against the holy sites and against the Palestinian residents in Sheikh Jarrah would lead to a comprehensive struggle throughout Palestine and a re-examination of relations with the Israeli government. The Committee called for the continuation of the struggle in the Palestinian territories and points of friction with the settlements (Wafa News Agency, May 9, 2021).

- The PA spokesmen praised the steadfastness of the residents of East Jerusalem and encouraged them to remain steadfast. At the same time, they condemned Israel, which they consider responsible for the escalation incidents. In their statements, the spokesmen directly link the escalation with the Israeli operations in Sheikh Jarrah and the Damascus Gate:
  - **Mahmoud Abbas praised the Palestinian people** in East Jerusalem and everywhere for their courageous stand to defend Jerusalem and to protect the holy sites in general
and the Al-Aqsa Mosque in particular, as well as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and Sheikh Jarrah. **Mahmoud Abbas stated that Israel bears full responsibility for the dangerous developments** (Wafa News Agency, May 7, 2021).

- **Mahmoud Abbas's spokesman Nabil Abu Rodeina** issued a statement condemning the escalation. He blamed the Israeli government and said that the continuation of Israel's aggressive policy against the Palestinians would lead to dangerous escalation of the situation. He called on the international community and the US administration to pressure Israel to cease its aggressive behavior (Wafa News Agency, May 7, 2021).

- **Fatah spokesman Osama Qawasmi** said that what was happening in Jerusalem was at the highest level of organized terrorism against the Palestinian people on Israel's part, noting that he placed all the blame on Israel for its aggression against the state of Palestine and against Jerusalem (Wafa News Agency, May 7, 2021).

![Cartoon in the Al-Araby Al-Jadeed daily newspaper comparing Israeli security forces to a mutant: "Israeli forces invade the plaza of the Al-Aqsa Mosque", "The Reckless Mutation" (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, London, May 9, 2021)](image)

- **Senior Hamas figures encouraged the residents of East Jerusalem, condemned Israel's actions and called for escalation in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria** (an intifada):

  - **Ismail Haniya, head of the Hamas political bureau**, praised those coming to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and those congregating on the streets of Jerusalem, declaring that the Palestinians would defend Jerusalem and confront Israel with all their might. He stressed that **the incidents in Jerusalem are good for the Palestinian people** because they are detonating the reservoirs of jihad of the Palestinian revolution and of the resistance that are inherent in the Palestinian people, and not only in Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Haniya noted that what is happening is **an intifada that must continue** and that they will not permit the Judaization of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and will not allow forces to break into the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Addressing
Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, he warned him against playing with fire, stating **that this was a campaign he could not win** (Al-Aqsa, May 7, 2021). Haniya’s remarks were also heard in the background of a short video posted by Hamas on social media containing edited clips documenting the clashes on the Temple Mount (PALINFO’s Twitter account, May 8, 2021).

In another statement, Haniya called for a cohesive stance against Israel’s aggression and crimes. He called for the mobilization of international Arab Muslim political and diplomatic elements in order to prevent Israel from continuing its aggressive policy against the Palestinian people and the holy places. According to him, **Israel’s actions have crossed all the red lines** (Dunya al-Watan, May 9, 2021).

**Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas’s military wing**, congratulated the Palestinians in Jerusalem on their steadfastness, noting that **Mohammed Deif, commander of the military wing, had made them a promise and he would not break it** (Telegram channel of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, May 8, 2021).

**Speaking at a rally in support of Sheikh Jarrah residents, Hamas political bureau member Fathi Hamad** said that the people of the Gaza Strip, its children, and its rockets are telling the whole world that they are **ready to act in accordance with the words of Mohammed Deif**, head of the military wing, and that they are ready to assist the residents of Jerusalem and will not let them confront Israel and the security coordination on their own. According to him, **all the brigades of the military wing of Hamas are in a state of alert**; Mohammed Deif is in the operations room of the wing together with representatives of the organizations in the joint war room. He noted that **they had rockets capable of reaching as far as Jerusalem** and that they were ready for **the uprising in Jerusalem to become an intifada**. He called on the residents of Jerusalem **to slit the throats of the Jews with knives** that cost only five shekels, and...
on the Islamic nation to turn the uprising in Jerusalem into a liberation intifada everywhere (Al-Aqsa, May 7, 2021).

- Khaled Mash'al, the leader of Hamas outside the Gaza Strip, said that the issue of Jerusalem unites the Palestinian people and that the anarchy at the Al-Aqsa Mosque is very dangerous. He noted that the residents of Jerusalem are fighting heroically and that no one is evading responsibility (Shehab, May 7, 2021). On another occasion, Mash'al noted that they are in contact with international elements to stop Israeli aggression in Jerusalem and called for a new intifada against Israel (PALINFO, May 8, 2021).

- Hamas's spokesman outside of the Gaza Strip Hussam Badran said that actions were being taken to unite the efforts and capabilities so that the battle over Jerusalem would be a battle of all the Palestinians. He noted that if Israel thinks that it can isolate Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque and take advantage of normalization for its own benefit, the response of the resistance will be different from what Israel expects. (Dunya al-Watan, May 8, 2021).

- Hamas's Al-Aqsa TV launched a series of special broadcasts about the demonstrations at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, with the channel's reporters broadcasting live from the scenes of the various demonstrations. During the broadcasts, the channel tried to incite the Palestinian public to come out and take part in the clashes. The channel also broadcast short clips between programs calling for terrorist attacks, and declarations and calls by senior officials from Hamas and other organizations.
The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) warned Israel against continuing its aggression against the Palestinians, noting that the Israeli leadership must understand the message sent by the resistance leadership. The PIJ called on Israeli Arabs and residents of the West Bank to take action (website of the military wing, May 9, 2021). PIJ Secretary General Ziyad al-Nakhaleh said that it was impossible to remain silent in the face of what was happening in East Jerusalem and that Israel should expect a response at any moment (Al-Mayadeen, May 7, 2021).

Reactions in Arab countries

The incidents in Jerusalem received widespread media coverage. The Arab media networks broadcast ongoing footage documenting the events. The coverage included live images of what was happening and comments by reporters. Most of the speakers also mentioned the eviction of Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah.

The Jordanian Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning the police for breaking into the Al-Aqsa compound, stating that this was a blatant violation and "wild and obscene behavior." Jordan demanded that the police be removed immediately and worshipers be permitted to exercise their freedom of worship during the nights of Ramadan. The spokesman warned Israel of the consequences of the dangerous escalation and also condemned the attacks against the residents of Sheikh Jarrah. Jordanian King Abdullah II spoke with Mahmoud Abbas. The Jordanian Foreign Minister spoke with his Palestinian counterpart to coordinate regional and international steps against Israel's actions in Jerusalem and on the
Temple Mount. The Jordanian Foreign Minister emphasized that Jordan would continue to make every effort to protect the holy sites, maintain the status quo and fight against Israeli violations (Jordanian State News Agency, May 9, 2021).

- The Egyptian Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning the Israeli police forces for breaking into the mosque and the attack on East Jerusalem residents and worshipers. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ahmad Hafez noted that Egypt was strongly opposed to illegal measures violating the rights of the Palestinian people, including further construction in the settlements, their expansion, land expropriation and the eviction of Palestinians from their homes. At the same time, Egypt is also working with Israel and Hamas to calm the situation in the Gaza Strip.

- The United Arab Emirates has expressed concern over the incidents in East Jerusalem. Minister of State Khalifa Shaheen Al Marri said that the United Arab Emirates strongly condemned the Israeli authorities for breaking into the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the eviction of the Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah. He stressed that Israel must take responsibility under the rules of international law to protect its Palestinian citizens and their right to practice their religion (Sky News in Arabic, May 8, 2021).

- Senior Turkish government officials severely criticized the incidents. Turkish President Erdoğan tweeted a condemnation message in Hebrew on his Twitter account, calling Israel's actions "abominable attacks." Presidential Spokesperson Ibrahim Kalın said that it was a disgrace for Israel and a disgrace for those who remain silent in the face of the attacks, calling for steadfastness in the face of "the occupation policy and aggression of the apartheid state." He further noted that "the occupying forces that do not respect the sanctity of these days must leave the Al-Aqsa Mosque immediately" (RT in Arabic, May 8, 2021).

Comments in the West

- Countries in the West also criticized Israel's actions, drawing a parallel between the incidents and the eviction of Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah. Palestinian commentators expressed satisfaction with the US response. They see it as an unprecedented statement stressing, for the first time in public, US concern over the eviction of Palestinian families. They also expressed satisfaction with the EU's responses and messages from European countries. Hani al-Habib, a commentator from Gaza, noted that what is happening supports the PA's position to turn to the International Criminal Court in
The Hague and brings the Palestinian issue back to the priorities of the international community (Al-Ghad, May 8, 2021).

- **US Department of State Spokesman Ned Price** issued a statement calling on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to act to calm the situation and curb the violence. According to the statement, it is critical for the parties to show restraint. The statement also notes that the US is concerned about the potential eviction of families from Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan and emphasizes that “it is critical to avoid steps that exacerbate tensions or take us farther away from peace” (US Department of State website, May 7, 2021).

- **The Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union** also expressed concern in the face of rising tension and violence in East Jerusalem. According to the announcement, both sides must pay the price for their actions. The EU called on the authorities to act urgently to reduce tension in Jerusalem, avoid violence in the Al-Aqsa Mosque area and honor the status quo. The announcement also states that the possible eviction of Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and other areas in East Jerusalem is also a cause for concern, since these actions are illegal under international humanitarian law (EU Foreign Affairs Council website, May 8, 2021).

- An official statement issued by the Quartet envoys stated that the envoys were concerned about the situation and the provocative declarations, rocket launches and continued launching of incendiary balloons from Gaza towards Israel, as well as attacks on Palestinian agricultural land in the West Bank. They called on Israel to exercise restraint and refrain from taking measures that would exacerbate the situation. They also called on both sides to respect the status quo in the holy places (EU Foreign Affairs Council website, May 9, 2021).

- **UN Envoy to the Middle East Tor Wennesland** issued a statement expressing concern over the difficult situation that has prevailed since the beginning of Ramadan, adding that over the past few days, civilians on both sides have been killed due to this situation. He called on the Israeli government to end the destruction and uphold its commitments in accordance with international law (Sawa, May 6, 2021).

- **The Russian Foreign Ministry** expressed concern and called on the sides to refrain from escalation. **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov** issued a statement condemning the clashes and noting that Russia is concerned about the developments and calls on all sides to refrain from any action that will exacerbate the violence even further. He also noted that land
expropriation in East Jerusalem is illegal and a violation of international law (Al-Arabiya in English, May 8, 2021).