

What is happening in Israel and Palestine at the Al Aqsa Mosque?

By Sarah Glynn



NATIONAL EXTRA

A Palestinian man runs away from tear gas during clashes with Israeli security forces in front of the Dome of the Rock Mosque at the Al Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City Monday, May 10

"Israeli officials are committing the crimes of apartheid and persecution." Not my words, but those of Human Rights Watch, who issued a report in April.

The Israeli government was quick to dismiss the report, but their recent actions demonstrate the truth of those words.

On May 15, the 73rd anniversary of the foundation of Israel, Palestinians will remember the Nakba, or Catastrophe, of the accompanying destruction of Palestinian communities and mass displacement of Palestinian people.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, many saw Israel as a guarantee against persecution. But Israel's creation created a new persecuted people. And over the intervening 73 years, attempts at patching together some sort of coexistence have

always been scuppered by those for whom any compromise on Israeli control is unacceptable.

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In justifying those 73 years of dominance, Israel has nurtured a prejudice against Palestinians that has fuelled an increasingly virulent ethno-nationalism.

In 1956, 28 Palestinian families who had been forced out of their homes by the Nakba were resettled in new housing, built by the Jordanian government and the United Nations, in Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem. In the 1967 war, East Jerusalem was occupied by Israel, and a few years later two Jewish communities registered ownership of the Sheikh Jarrah land.

So began a history of court cases, forced evictions and expropriations as the homes, which now house some 500 people, became caught up in Israel's policy of replacing Jerusalem's Palestinians with Jews. The appeal hearing against the eviction of 40 people was scheduled to take place on Monday, and protesters have been gathering.

Israel's ongoing erasure of Palestinians and Palestinian culture from Jerusalem is a continuation of the 1948 Nakba. Palestinian Jerusalemites suffer continual harassment, and security concerns are used to restrict traditional activities, such as gatherings outside the Damascus Gate after Ramadan night prayers.



Palestinians evacuate a wounded protester during clashes with Israeli security forces at the Lions Gate in Jerusalem's Old City, Monday, May 10

Last Friday, as Ramadan drew towards its end, Al Aqsa Mosque was full of worshippers. They were joined by people taking refuge from police crackdowns in other parts of the city. In a show of brute force and cultural arrogance, Israeli forces stormed the mosque with tear **gas**, stun grenades and rubber-coated steel bullets. Hundreds of worshippers were injured, many in the head and eyes. Shocking as this was, it was not the first time Israel had stormed Al Aqsa.

On Saturday there were protests across Israel/Palestine. Police carried out raids and arrests in East Jerusalem, and as worshippers travelled to the city for that night's prayers, buses were stopped, forcing many to continue on foot. Worshippers also faced police violence outside the Damascus Gate.

On Monday, in response to rising tensions, the court case was postponed, and the planned Jerusalem Day march was cancelled just before it was due to start, though that didn't stop hundreds of Israeli nationalists marching through parts of the city to celebrate its 1967 capture. Meanwhile, any pretence at defusing the situation vanished as Israeli forces again stormed the mosque, leaving 228 people hospitalised.

In Gaza, the Hamas government responded by launching rockets into Israeli cities as they called on Israel to withdraw their forces from Al Aqsa and Sheikh Jarrah.

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Instead, Israel stormed the mosque again that night and again on Tuesday - when the Palestinian Red Crescent reported Israeli forces blocking entry to their medics. And they used the Hamas rockets as an excuse to launch bomb attacks on Gaza of a scale not seen since 2014.

By midday on Wednesday, Israeli bombs had killed 48 people. These included a Hamas commander and fighters, but also many civilians, among them 14 children. Six civilians had been killed in Israel by Hamas rockets.

Threatened with a war whose consequences would reverberate around the world, Israel has shown no interest in a ceasefire. Protestors everywhere have come onto the streets to support the Palestinians standing up against Israeli oppression, but world leaders are failing to provide the needed response, with many drawing a false equivalence between oppression by a colonial power and resistance by a colonised people.

The United States, on whom Israel relies for support, blocked the UN Security Council Statement calling for a ceasefire, and President Biden seems determined to fail this vital test of his promised "moral authority".