



## Israeli Forces Elicit Condemnation for Storming the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Brutally Dispersing Worshipers

The actions of Israeli forces have again drawn condemnation over this past week after the violent storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Israeli police raided the mosque compound, using batons, rubber-coated bullets, and tear gas to disperse and attack large crowds of gathered worshipers. An array of documented evidence demonstrated how Israeli forces brutally beat and assaulted mosque staff and ordinary citizens alike, including elders, refuting their claims that they were merely “re-establishing order” and “removing demonstrators.” Additionally troubling was the fact that humanitarian and emergency service organizations highlighted that many of their medics were prevented from reaching those who were injured and in need of immediate assistance in the mosque compound. Provocative social media posts calling for Jewish Israelis to go to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and take over the site inflamed the situation even further, as have multiple waves of settler incursions aided by the Israeli police. Rights and social justice groups are concerned that Israel’s incendiary actions will only serve to exacerbate tensions and could lead to an escalation in violence.

Jewish Israelis were also worshipping on the site, which violates an internationally-recognized agreement that states non-Muslims are allowed to visit Al-Aqsa but not pray there. Though raids by settlers and Israeli forces are not uncommon, these were usually scaled down or canceled during Muslim holidays, including the holy month of Ramadan. In recent years, however, an increasing number of settlers and police forces have entered the mosque, with analysts pointing out that it appears to be part of an attempt to deny Palestinians any sense of sovereignty – even at this sacred site. It is also especially inflammatory due to the fact that Palestinians are already subjected to unlawful land seizures and forcible displacements, and thus problematic infringements are now being made here as well.

In addition to their alarm at the incidents, human rights groups have condemned the behavior of Israeli forces. Regional actors have also joined in on the criticism. Jordan, which has custodianship over the holy site, issued a joint statement with the Palestinian Authority (PA) saying that Israel’s actions were dangerous and could lead to escalation. Furthermore, some see the actions as an attempt to deter Palestinians from coming to the mosque, and as such, solidarity protests emerged in response. The PA called on the United States to speak out unequivocally regarding the continued pattern of Israeli aggression. Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia also condemned the raid. The growing cycle of violence has concerned many regarding the fear that it could lead to an outbreak of armed conflict – similar to that which transpired back in May of last year. The war claimed the lives of at least 260 Palestinians, including 66 children, and devastated the Gaza Strip – with consistent evidence of indiscriminate Israeli air bombardments that targeted non-combatant infrastructure in the region.

The latest escalation in tensions coincides with the intersection of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, the week-long Jewish Passover celebration, and Christian Easter. It is the hope of observers that the episodes of violence do not devolve any further, and Israeli forces’ provocations have rightfully been condemned across the board for their damaging role in fueling hostilities.