

Conflict Management at the Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa Compound: Lessons From Recent Crises

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Unrest at Jerusalem's Holy Compound often manifests widely throughout the country and region. When Israel gained control of the sacred site during the 1967 war, Israel agreed to limit Jewish worship at the Temple Mount while Jordan administered Al-Aqsa, the third most holy site for Sunni Muslims. Known as the Status Quo, this arrangement has steadily eroded in the past 15 years. This paper analyzes the series of crises from 2014 to 2023 and identifies the pattern: Domestic Israeli pressure results in an ever-increasing number of Jewish worshippers to ascend the Temple Mount; Muslims interpret this as a desire to Judaize or divide the sacred site. Israeli police forces—along with a weakened Jordan—manage resulting violence, often with diplomatic rows and occasionally with United States intervention. This repeating cycle evinces Israel's ineffective conflict management and predicts future disputes. Hamas named its October 7, 2023, military offensive on southern Israel "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood". Constructing a narrative of Israel's intention to usurp the Muslim holy space, Hamas seeks to mobilize both domestic Palestinian and global Islamic support for its actions.

Keywords: Al-Aqsa Mosque, Temple Mount, conflict management, status quo, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, sacred sites, religious identity

Introduction

The Hamas's attack on the settlements in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, the head of the movement's military branch announced the opening of Operation Tufan Al-Aqsa (Al-Aqsa Flood) and said: "They attacked the Islamic movement and desecrated Al-Aqsa; we warned them in the past". Hanging the attack on Israel's actions in the Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa complex was indeed a pretense, as the second intifada was called the Al-Aqsa Intifada, but the great weight of the Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa issue and the fact that since 2021 the Hamas movement has turned the Al-Aqsa issue into a propaganda flagship on its way to conquering the Palestinian and all-Islamic public opinion cannot be ignored. The use of Al-Aqsa as a political moto reflects the changes that the holy compound went through since the establishment of the 1967 Status Quo applied to the holy complex.

Hamas' military arm named its October 7, 2023 attack on southern Israeli Settlements Operation Al-Aqsa Flood (Tufan Al-Aqsa), saying "they attacked the Islamic movement and desecrated Al-Aqsa; we warned them

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in the past” (Halabi, 2023). By connecting Israel’s action at the holy site to their war’s name, Hamas invoked the Second Intifada, which was named “The Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa Intifada”. In the two decades separating the conflicts, however, the weighty issue of this sacred space has changed. Since 2021, the Hamas movement has styled itself as being the protectors of the site in a propaganda move designed to conquer both Palestinian and pan-Islamic public opinion. The use of Al-Aqsa as a political motto reflects the changes that the holy compound has been undergoing since the 1967 Status Quo understanding about the landmark.

The Holy Compound in Jerusalem (The Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa¹), Jews’ and Muslims’ sacred space has been contested since 1967 both in Israel/Palestine and beyond. Under the principle of freedom of access and recently also freedom of worship, Israel applied a policy of sharing the sacred compound while Palestinian Muslims, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and other Arab and Muslim actors insist on Islamic exclusivity. The Status Quo understandings between Israel and the Jordanian Waqf administrators collapsed in late September 2000 with the outbreak of the second Palestinian uprising (Al-Aqsa Intifada). Since then, significant changes to the status quo were introduced by the major actors of the conflict, eroding the post-1967 understandings and creating a series of crises surrounding the holy compound.

If territorial claims persist for long periods of time, are prone to militarization and escalation, and dominate foreign policy agendas (Owsiak & McLoughlin Mitchell, 2019), claims involving religious and sacred values such as shared holy sites have a high potential for escalation and mass-scale violence (Atran, Ginges, Medin, & Shikaki, 2008).

This article examines Israel’s crisis management at the holy site between 2014 and 2023. The major research questions to be addressed are: Did Israel manage the conflict efficiently? Did it succeed in minimizing the negative impacts arising from the controversy? Addressing these questions, we shall investigate the methods of management that Israel used to cope with the conflict and contain its violence, the grounds for each of the methods used (accommodation, avoidance, collaboration, forcing, or compromising (Management Weekly, 2021), and the effectiveness in restoring public order and stability.

The article begins by presenting the new status quo established at the holy site after the Six Day War and its gradual erosion until the second decade of the 21st century. After that, we discuss Israel’s actions to expand the rights of the Temple organizations and the Jewish religious nationalists supporting them. Then, we analyze the main crisis that occurred on and around the Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa compound before ending with Israel’s integrative evaluation of conflict management performance and the struggle’s consequences on Israel’s relations with the Palestinian Authority and Jordan.

Post 1967 Status Quo

Al Aqsa is the third holiest place in Sunni Islam. The fact that Israel has occupied it interferes with its management, and promoting the rights of religious Jews in the compound generates anti-Israeli and Jewish feelings throughout the Muslim world. Muslims living in Jerusalem have always seen Al-Aqsa as the center of their identity. They are motivated to protect it and define themselves as *Murabitun* (protectors of the land of Islam). Moreover, since 1967 Al-Haram Al -Sharif/Al Aqsa compound is the only site where they feel relative freedom from the Israeli occupation. In fact, Al-Aqsa’s esplanade serves as an open public space in the heart of

¹ In this article, the terms Holy Compound, Al-Aqsa, Al-Haram Al-Sharif, and the Temple Mount are used interchangeably to refer to the same holy complex. Usually the term Al-Aqsa will appear in a Muslim context, Al-Haram Al-Sharif in a Jordanian context, and Temple Mount in an Israeli-Jewish context. Holy Compound was introduced as a neutral term.

the crowded Old City (Alinat-Abed, 2021; Abu Al-Awar, 2019).

Jews view the Temple Mount as their holiest place, but in 1967 the Israeli government developed the outer façade of the Western Wall of this holy compound as a substitute place of worship. The highest spiritual leadership, the Chief Rabbinical Council, decreed that observant Jews should not enter the Temple Mount compound due to their interpretations of Jewish law (halacha).

After occupying the West Bank in June 1967, Israel annexed East Jerusalem and unilaterally established its sovereignty over the Temple Mount complex as well. As early as June 1967, Israel created a new status quo according to which the Muslim Waqf administration—under Jordanian control—would continue to manage the holy compound, and Israeli Jews could visit the compound as tourists.

In order to ensure the freedom of access of non-Muslims, Israel made sure to keep the keys to the Mughrabi Gate in its hands (Reiter, 2001). The Israeli government focused on the Western Wall, and Jewish visits to the Temple Mount—especially by religious and ideological groups such as the Temple Mount Faithful Movement—were held during visiting hours and arrangements were all coordinated between the Israeli Police and the Waqf authorities (Reiter, 2008). The series of understandings usually prevented violent outbreaks and also made it possible to calm tensions after violent political events.

This situation existed for 30 years until Israel unilaterally opened the northern exit of the Western Wall tunnel in September 1996. This act caused widespread violence that claimed victims and, as a result, the Waqf administration stopped coordinating its public works with Israeli authorities. At the same time, the Northern Islamic Movement launched a campaign called “Al-Aqsa in danger” (Reiter, 2005, p. 91) and worked to build two large prayer halls connected to each other in the underground spaces of the holy compound.

Another landmark event that contributed to the erosion of the status quo was Ariel Sharon’s provocative visit in September 2000, which was the trigger for the second intifada, named after Al-Aqsa (Shargai, 2000). Following the violent clashes erupted after that visit the Temple Mount was closed to non-Muslim visitors for about three years until Israel unilaterally reopened it in August 2003. Since then, non-Muslims have been allowed to visit only the open esplanade of the holy compound. The Waqf no longer allows visitors to enter the three main buildings on the site as it did before: the Al-Aqsa Mosque and its underground halls, the Dome of the Rock, and the Islamic Museum (Reiter, 2016, p. 62).

Recent Changes of the Status Quo

The post 1967 status quo’s erosion began in late 1996 and continued to escalate in recent years because significant Israeli changes were introduced on the ground. This resulted in a Muslims’ claim that Israel intends to divide the compound between Jews and Muslims in space and time. What are the major changes? First, the Israeli police stopped coordinating the visits of Jewish religious groups with the Waqf. Second, unlike the previous policy, since 2015 the police collaborated with the Temple organizations assisting them to expand Jewish at the expense of Muslim rights. Third, the police facilitate the entrance of Jewish religious visitors in large groups (dozens in a group compared to nine visitors in the past) in a way that makes ineffective any attempt to prevent provocative behavior (such as voicing prayers, singing, chanting the Israeli anthem, raising Israeli flag etc.). Fourth, the police allowed the Jewish groups to pray silently (and sometimes even out loud) when they arrive to a spot off sight of Muslims. Fifth, the police removed Waqf guards from escorting the Jewish groups—a custom that in the past made it difficult for Jewish provocateurs to violate the rules of conduct. The temple organizations attribute this change in policy to two nominations: Gilad Erdan as Minister of Internal Security in

2015 and Yoram Halevi as commander of the Jerusalem District of the Police in 2016 (Shragai, 2020, p. 199; Shragai, 2018).

The activity of the Jewish Temple Mount organizations and the hundreds of rabbis who support them resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of Jewish visitors to the site, from a few per year in the early 1990's to almost 50,000 in 2022 (this number includes repeat visits). The religious visitors come in organized groups that have recently been incorporated into an organization called the "Temple Mount Administration". It works in close coordination with (and receives assistance from) the Israeli police.

In reaction, beginning in 2012, the Northern Islamic movement expanded its "Al-Aqsa is in danger" campaign and activated groups of men and women whose role was to "protect" Al-Aqsa from the Jews. The *Murabitun* (men) and *Murabitat* (women) surrounded and harassed the religious Jewish groups who went up to the Temple Mount and shouted, "Allahu Akbar" (Reiter, 2016, p. 64). When these and other Muslim groups reacted by harassing Jewish visiting groups, staying overnight barricading themselves inside the mosque with stones and firearms, organizing mass demonstrations on the compound, the Israeli police operated to curtail the rights of Muslims by applying age restrictions named "dilutions" (not allowing Muslims to enter the compound under the age of 55) and sometimes even closing the compound for entrance, even during prayer time. For example, in 2014, there were 22 complete closures of the holy compound to Muslims during the visiting hours of Jews and 41 "dilutions". Practically, this meant that only 5,000 Muslim worshipers instead of the usual 35,000 were allowed to perform the Friday prayer in Al-Aqsa.²

The official policy of the Chief Rabbinate was challenged by a growing number of rabbis affiliated with the Israeli nationalist religious stream. Many of them are settlers in the West Bank, who believe that Israel should hold to the entire historical Land of Israel and implement sovereignty and freedom of worship for Jews at the Temple Mount (Reiter, 2016, p. 56; Beer, 2001). They join forces with the Temple organizations and endorse their communities to frequently visit the Mount, by doing so increasing their share of and rights in the site evoking the liberal discourse of: freedom of access and freedom of worship (two values anchored in the Israeli law). Moreover, the national religious community in Israel together with the Temple associations succeeded to consolidate the hearts and minds of the majority of Israeli Knesset members, particularly from the right wing (Ir Amim Association, 2014). In a survey conducted by Miskar on May 18, 2014 among the religious Zionist sector, 75.4% responded that they were in a favor of Jews ascending to the Temple Mount. 96.8% of them said the ascent to the Mount would be "a contribution to strengthening Israeli sovereignty at the place of the temple", and only 54.4% said that one should go up there in order to "perform the *mitzvah* (commandment, or a good deed) of praying at the place" (Perisco, 2014). Another survey conducted in the middle of 2021 found that 53% of the Jewish public in Israel supports the right of Jews to pray on the Temple Mount. Since the majority of the Israeli public is secular, we can interpret this as support for nationalism and protection of freedom of access and worship (Reiter, 2016, p. 69).

Police activities emanated from a strong Jewish political pressure. During 2013-2014 around half of the Likud Knesset members worked toward increasing Jewish visitation. Ministers and deputies conducted visits to the Temple Mount. The desire to improve the status of Jews on the Temple Mount went beyond even the right-wing politicians. MK Hillik Bar, Secretary General of the Labor Party, a left-center party, also participated in the

² The words of Minister of Internal Security Yitzhak Aharonovitch at the meeting of the Knesset's Interior and Environmental Protection Committee, dated October 27, 2014. That year there were also 14 partial closures (reduction of visiting hours) of the Temple Mount for Jewish visitors.

erosion of the status quo in June 2014 by submitting a bill in support of Jews' worship rights; however, he withdrew his support for the bill three days later due to heavy pressure from his party (Bill, 2014).

An example of the consequences of the involvement of Knesset members on the issue of Temple Mount visits is illustrated by Likud MK Miri Regev. When she was the chairwoman of the Knesset's Interior and Environmental Protection Committee, she repeatedly criticized the police for not allowing more Jews access to the holy site. The former commander of the Jerusalem District of the Police, Superintendent Yossi Parenti, said on television that the intense and obsessive preoccupation of the Knesset's Interior Committee on this issue has caused great unrest in the Muslim world while boosting many Jewish organizations' interest the holy site (HaMakor, 2016).

The Role of Jordan

Jordan plays an important role in Al-Haram Al-Sharif complex. Israel recognizes Jordan's responsibility as Islamic Waqf administrator of the compound. The 1994 peace agreement signed between Israel and Jordan defined Jordan's role in future negotiating Jerusalem's Islamic holy places. On one hand, Israel claims exclusive sovereignty and therefore takes unilateral actions when they have an internal political need. On the other hand, Israel coordinates operations with Jordan to preserve to security stability vis-a-vis the Palestinians. Because Jordan sees deviations from the status quo to be a violation of the treaty, Israel's strategic alliance is endangered.

In 2013, the head of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, and King Abdullah II signed an agreement according to which the guardianship of Al-Haram Al-Sharif was given to King Abdullah and the Hashemite Kingdom. The agreement reflects an attempt to create a united Jordanian-Palestinian front versus Israel in everything related to the holy compound. From Jordan's perspective, recent developments at Al-Haram Al-Sharif are a matter of national security; it could destabilize the West Bank, and, as a result, upset internal stability. Hence, any erosion of the status quo taken unilaterally by Israel provokes a swift Jordanian reaction. King Abdullah II can ill afford to be seen as someone who accepts such actions from Israel, particularly when Muslims see these actions as attempts to divide the Al-Aqsa compound between Muslims and Jews.

Crises Evolving the Sacred Compound

The changes introduced by Israel and the reactions of Palestinian Muslims resulted since the summer of 2014 in a series of crises. The following is a chronological description of them.

Fall 2014 Crisis

During the summer of 2014, tensions increased in Jerusalem following a series of Palestinian acts of insurrection and popular terrorism against Jews that dated back to 2012. The result was a 50-day Israeli military operation (Protective Edge) in the Gaza Strip (Segal, 2014). In the fall of 2014, tensions rose again. Chairman of the Temple Mount Heritage Foundation, Yehuda Glick, said at an October 24th meeting that there should be separate visits by Jews to the holy compound where Muslims are unable to access, relating to the division at the Cave of the Patriarchs as a model for dividing the Temple Mount.³ Only two days later, Glick was shot and severely wounded by a Palestinian while delivering a speech during the "Israel Is Returning to the Temple Mount" conference at the Begin Heritage Center in Jerusalem. The perpetrator cited Glick's position on the Temple Mount issue as motivation for the shooting. After the assault, entry to the compound was closed for everyone for

³ Minutes of the Meeting of the Interior and Environmental Protection Committee of the Knesset, October 27, 2014.

one day, and then opened to Muslim visitors with age restrictions. In response, Palestinians in East Jerusalem declared a general strike, Jordan recalled its Israeli ambassador, and threatened to sever diplomatic ties with Israel.

PA Chairman Mahmood Abbas responded at a special gathering called “Al-Aqsa and Al-Quds Defense Conference”, that

All of us are required to stand at the front of Al-Aqsa ...we must prevent them in every way from entering Al-Aqsa Mosque and our churches. They must not enter them and defile them. We will stand before them bare-chested to protect the holy places.⁴

At this point, the American government intervened in order to prevent violence from spreading outside of Jerusalem and resolve the Israeli-Jordanian diplomatic crisis. Secretary of State John Kerry met the King of Jordan and Israel’s Prime Minister (Reiter, 2016, p. 20). For his part, PM Netanyahu pledged to prevent Knesset members from visiting the Temple Mount, abstain from implementing age restrictions on Muslim visitors, and limit Jewish visitors’ intent on provoking confrontation. King Abdullah II committed to preventing young Palestinians from sneaking into the compound at night. Because of these bilateral measures, violence in the holy compound decreased, and the crisis passed.⁵

Fall 2015 Crisis

At the end of July 2015, on Jewish Tisha B’Av (a day of fasting and mourning the destruction of the ancient temples), Arab social networks reported that an increasing number of Jews would be permitted to enter and pray at the holy compound (Hasson, 2015a). Police forces entered Al-Aqsa Mosque to disperse a group of Palestinians preparing for violent confrontations against religious Jewish visitors, inflaming tempers. Another factor in the crisis was Israel’s banning of the Islamic movement’s *Murabitun* and *Murabitat* from the holy compound.

In East Jerusalem, Palestinians began a series of attacks against Jews in September against the background of what they considered a Jewish invasion of Al-Aqsa. These uprisings took three names: The Knives’ Intifada, Al-Quds Intifada, or Intifada of the Individuals, and damaged local and regional stability. To some, it seemed like a third intifada (Palestinian uprising) was imminent because elements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were included. Speaking on behalf of the Palestinians, Abdullah II of Jordan stated that “Al-Aqsa Mosque is all of Al-Haram Al-Sharif [i.e. not only the mosque and the Dome of the Rock, Y. R.] and we will not accept partnership or division of it”.⁶

At the height of the crisis, Mahmood Abbas called to return to the pre-2000 status quo and said that Israel should stop “settlers” from visiting the complex if they wanted to improve the situation.⁷ He also called the Palestinians to continue opposing the “incursions” into Al-Aqsa Mosque and to stop Israelis from dividing it.

Al-Aqsa is ours and so is the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. We will not allow them to defile the mosque with their dirty feet, we will do everything we can to protect Jerusalem and we will stay there. We will protect the Holy places for Christianity and Islam and we will not leave our city.⁸

On May 15, 2015, Sheikh Ikrima Sabri invited the Turkish Minister of Religious Affairs to give a speech at Al-Aqsa Mosque. The minister talked about renewing the Ottoman Caliphate, suggesting that Jordan is not

⁴ Al-Asimah (PLO outlet) 29 October, 2014.

⁵ “How to Maintain the Fragile Calm on the Temple Mount”, International Crisis Group Briefing, No. 48, p. 1.

⁶ The Jordanian News Agency, *Petra*, September 15, 2020.

⁷ Abbas’ words to the US Secretary of State, according to his spokesman, Nabil Abu Rudeineh: “Israel Must Maintain Temple Mount Status Quo, Abbas Tells Kerry”, *Times of Israel*, October 24, 2015.

⁸ Al-Hayat (London), September 17, 2015.

fulfilling its role. In response, the Jordanian supreme judge visited Al-Aqsa Mosque and delivered a sermon, but he was repeatedly interrupted by Palestinian worshipers, who claimed that Jordan was not properly protecting it (Reiter, 2016, p. 99).

Israeli PM Netanyahu responded to the claims of the Palestinians and Jordanians by saying that Israel is careful to maintain the status quo and that the claims about seeking to divide the Temple mount are nothing but incitement. According to him, elements organized by Hamas and the Northern Islamic Movement are violating the status quo by funding groups that disturb Jewish visitors during their visit to the site (Reiter, 2016, p. 99). King Abdullah II responded by demanding that the situation be restored to normal, and claimed that he judges Israel by its actions, not by the statements of its leaders (Reiter, 2016, p. 99).

Following the security deterioration instigated by the events surrounding the holy compound, France initiated a proposal at the United Nations where an international observer force similar to the one stationed in Hebron would be on the Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa compound to supervise the implementation of the status quo. Israel opposed this proposal and, together with the U.S., worked to thwart this initiative (Reiter, 2016, p. 99). In order to prove that Israel does not seek to divide the Temple Mount, Netanyahu—under American pressure—gave formal public support for a total ban on Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount, contrary to the rulings of Israeli courts, which ruled that the right of Jews to pray there can be limited only by danger to public order. He also asked the members of the Knesset, including the Arab MKs, not to visit the Temple Mount “in the near future”. He also announced that he would prevent both ministers and members of the Knesset from visiting during this period.⁹ Israel agreed to a number of confidence-building measures, and on Friday, October 30, the Muslim age restrictions were removed. Once again, the police allowed the *Murabitun* to enter the holy compound.

At the end of a meeting between the Prime Minister of Israel and the King of Jordan, they issued separate statements, which indicated a deterioration in bilateral relations. The International Crisis Group reported that King Abdullah II was outraged by Netanyahu’s blatant disregard of the personal agreement between them from 2014 and refused to meet him.¹⁰

Similarly to the fall of 2014, Secretary of State John Kerry came to the region in fall 2015 to bring calm. After meeting with King Abdullah II and Mahmood Abbas, Kerry announced on October 24, 2015, that Netanyahu agreed to Jordan’s proposal of providing around-the-clock surveillance via security cameras. He also reported that Netanyahu pledged to enforce the status quo policy of admitting Muslim worshipers and non-Muslim as visitors (only).¹¹

Former Palestinian mufti Sheikh Ikrama Sabri criticized the understandings as strengthening Israel’s legitimacy at the holy compound. To address the Palestinian concerns, King Abdullah II met with the Waqf council and Palestinian personalities to explain that the cameras were a Jordanian initiative designed to expose Israel’s violations. This did not help. In a rare show of cooperation, Hamas, Fatah, faction leaders in East Jerusalem and left-wing parties addressed Waqf director Sheikh Azzam Al-Khatib and threatened to break any camera installed on the square.¹² The first author of this article saw signs hanging around the holy compound featuring a camera with an X over it and a line reading “We will break the hands of those who install” (the cameras).

⁹ Report of the International Crisis Group, Jerusalem, April 2016, pp. 11-12.

¹⁰ Report of the International Crisis Group, Jerusalem, April 2016, p. 6.

¹¹ Haaretz 26 October, 2015.

¹² Report of the International Crisis Group, Jerusalem, April 2016, pp. 11-12.

In the week after the agreements, it seemed that the Israeli police were working to restrict the steps of the Jewish Temple Mount activists, and one prominent figure was given an expulsion order. The *Murabitun* returned to Al-Aqsa, but they limited their activities to the mosque. Visiting Jewish groups were then limited to nine only, and there was a report that a group of 25 people were denied entry in order to allow the previous group to complete their visit (Hasson, 2015b). In other words, Israel restored the pre-2000 status quo arrangements regarding the conduct of Jewish visitation.

The Magnetometers Crisis: July 2017

On Friday, July 14, 2017, three Israeli Muslim attackers from Umm al-Fahm entered the holy compound, armed themselves there, shot and killed two policemen, and wounded another before being shot dead by the police. In reaction, the police closed the compound for searches and investigations, precluding Muslims from holding Friday and Saturday prayers. Before allowing Muslims to return on Sunday, the police installed security cameras and metal detectors at three entrances to the holy site (Senior, 2017).

Both the entire Muslim public and the Waqf administration perceived this decision as a sign of Israel imposing its sovereignty. The Waqf advised worshippers not to enter the compound as long as the cameras and devices remained in place. Sheikh Muhammad Hussein, the Chief Mufti of the Palestinian Authority, issued a *fatwa* (legal opinion) prohibiting Muslims from entering the holy compound under these conditions. The Muslim public obeyed, and for a week Muslims conducted prayers and mass gathering outside the gates of the holy compound; apart from a few isolated incidents, the protests were non-violent. Some clashes broke out in East Jerusalem and the West Bank (Goren, 2020). During this period of time, only religious Jews visited the Temple Mount, and a few of them even prayed.

King Abdullah II held a phone conversation with Israeli PM Netanyahu condemning the attack on Israeli policemen and expressing opposition to all forms of violence, insisting that the situation in Al-Haram Al-Sharif be calm. At the same time, the king criticized the decision to close the compound after the attack.¹³ Contrast this with the Jordanian Minister of Awqaf's message to Israel that warned against "continuing the unprecedented damage to the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque under the pretext of curbing the tense violence".¹⁴ Mahmoud Abbas returned early from his visit to China because of this crisis. He called on Donald Trump's adviser Jared Kushner to "urgently intervene and force Israel to withdraw from the measures at Al-Aqsa Mosque, including the removal of the magnetometers... The situation is extremely dangerous and things could get out of control if Israel does not withdraw", he said.¹⁵

The Supreme Sharia Judge and Abbas' adviser on religious affairs, Mahmoud al-Habash, said that "responsibility for Al-Aqsa Mosque is the exclusive right of the Palestinians and that Israeli intervention in the affairs of Al-Aqsa constitutes aggression against the religious and political rights of Muslims".¹⁶

The head of the political bureau of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, praised the perpetrators of the attack against the Israeli police managing: "The sovereignty of Jerusalem does not belong to the Zionist occupiers. The *Murabitun* in Al-Aqsa prove that sovereignty belongs to the [Palestinian] residents of Jerusalem and the Palestinian people only".¹⁷

¹³ <https://kingabdullah.jo>. Notice of July 15, 2017.

¹⁴ Al-Ghad (Jordan) 14 July, 2017.

¹⁵ [www.http://waffa.ps](http://waffa.ps), 27 July, 2017.

¹⁶ Al-Hayat al-Jadidah, July 20, 2017.

¹⁷ www.palinfo.com from July 20, 2017.

A week after the attack, Palestinian organizations declared it would be a day of confrontation, called a “Day of Rage”, with the security forces; many thousands of Muslim worshippers came to protest at Al-Aqsa’s entrances on Friday, July 21. The police dispersed the protests by force and consequently three protesters were killed.¹⁸ That evening in Amman, Jordan, a young furniture installer (probably motivated by Israel’s actions at Al-Aqsa) attacked an Israeli Embassy security guard at his apartment. The guard killed the attacker and injured the apartment owner. When Israel refused to allow Jordanian authorities to investigate the guard, a large group of Jordanians surrounded the Israeli embassy and laid siege to it (Eichner & Case, 2017).

Jordan conditioned its dispersal of the embassy crowd on the removal of the metal detectors placed at Al-Haram Al-Sharif’s entrances. On July 24, Israel’s political-security cabinet decided to remove the metal detectors and replace them with sophisticated camera installations. Still, the Palestinians refused to enter the compound and continued the protests each evening; as a result, Netanyahu ordered the removal of the infrastructure where the devices were supposed to be installed (News, 2017). Upon Israel’s removal of the detectors, Turkish President Recep Erdogan called on the Muslims of the world to come protect Al-Aqsa from the Jews. Saudi Arabia was the only Arab country that supported the metal detector installation and Israeli control in Al-Haram Al-Sharif (Hasson, 2017, p. 217).

The Winter 2018 Crisis at Bab Al-Rahma

Known as the Gate of Mercy, there is an adjacent building whose top floor was used in the early 2000’s by Waqf administrators to organize *Umrah* and *Hajj* (pilgrimages). The Northern Islamic Movement used the lower floor until the Jerusalem District Commander ordered it closed in 2005. The reasoning for the closure was that a Hamas-affiliated organization called the Islamic Heritage Committee also used the space. Throughout the years of the building’s closure the Waqf asked to renovate the building’s leaky roof and then situate the “Institute for the Studies of the Writings of Imam Abu Hamed Al-Ghazali” (a Muslim theologian from the 11th-12th centuries) under the leadership of Professor Mustafa Abu Sway, an Al-Quds University lecturer as well as a member of Jerusalem’s Waqf Council and the Hashemite Foundation for the Renovation of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. Israel rejected the request out of the fear that the institute would be used to spread anti-Israeli propaganda and incitement. Thus, the building remained closed (Reiter, 2016, p. 92).

Beginning in 2005, the police renewed the closure order every six months, yet they forgot to renew it in the summer of 2018.¹⁹ On February 13, 2019, an expanded Waqf Council that now included figures from the PA and Fatah party members decided to unilaterally open the locked building and hold a short prayer there. The police responded by fitting new iron gates with locks at the building’s entrance. In reaction, riots ensued in East Jerusalem and on the Al-Aqsa Compound, resulting in the arrest of several Palestinians. At the time, Jewish Temple Mount organizations had set their sights on establishing a synagogue in place of this building, which was a motivating factor for the Waqf to use it (Ehrenfeld, 2019).

During the crisis, Muslim worshippers repeatedly broke through the locked gate and held protest prayers inside and the building. The Waqf’s original demand to open the building as an educational institute was replaced by a popular Palestinian demand for it to become a prayer hall.²⁰ When the entrance locks were broken, the head of the Waqf’s Supreme Council, Sheikh Abd al-Azim Salhab and his deputy were arrested. Simultaneously, the

¹⁸ A month for the Bab Al-Rahma crisis—a case study, *Ir Amin website*, March 18, 2019.

¹⁹ Interview with a police officer who asked to remain anonymous, February 12, 2019.

²⁰ Report of the Ir Amim Association, a month for the Bab al-Rahma crisis—a case study, March 18, 2019, p. 4.

police legally closed the building to avoid a harsh reaction from Jewish Temple Mount organizations.²¹ The court determined that the police had no legal grounds for the arrests and ordered both men to be released. Moreover, they ruled that the police's action to close the building in absence of a valid order was illegal.²² At that point, Netanyahu announced that he would grant the Jordanian request to carry out renovations of the building.²³ Following the bilateral coordination, the Israeli police removed the gates and locks and released those arrested (Ben Menachem, 2019). The unrest, however, continued.

On March 12, a detonator was thrown at the Temple Mount's police station, resulting in a building fire and injuries to an officer. Although Waqf personnel extinguished the fire, the incident was broadcast across Muslim media channels, provoking unrest. Finally, two boys accused of throwing a Molotov cocktail at the station were arrested. They explained that they threw it at an officer who was recorded entering Bab Al-Rahma while still wearing his shoes (Hasson, 2014). Accordingly, the police cleared Muslim worshippers from the holy complex and closed entry for the rest of the day. Two days later, Jewish Temple Mount activists came to the building accompanied by policemen who guarded them as they prayed and recited blessings. One visitor made a long speech in which Muslims were declared "the modern spirit of Amalek (staunch enemy of the biblical Israelites)", and said that "after we wipe out Amalek we will build our temple" (Hasson, 2014). The Ir Amim Association concluded that the police contributed to the crisis outbreak while oscillating between restraint and force.²⁴

In the absence of a Jordanian-Israeli agreement about the building's future, it was determined by events as a Muslim prayer venue. Non-Muslim visitors are not allowed to descend the steps to the building. Even amidst the Health Ministry's COVID-19 prohibitions on gatherings, the police allowed Muslims to assemble there. Naturally, this exception was to maintain calm and reiterate Israel's preference for the Waqf as Bab-Al Rahma administrator over more extreme groups.²⁵

Between this crisis and the next, there were clashes on Hebrew commemoration of Tisha B'Av, which fell on a Muslim holiday in 2019 with the backdrop of Internal Security Minister Gilad Erdan's statements on the necessity of permitting Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount.

Quickly condemning Erdan was the Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who interpreted this as yet another Israeli attempt to change the 1967 status quo. The Ministry warned of the "serious consequences" this would have.²⁶ They took the further step of summoning the Israeli ambassador for a reprimand, emphasizing that Israel's violations at Al-Aqsa are dire.²⁷ Then, the lower house of the Jordanian parliament held an urgent, non-plenary meeting during which a list of recommendations was approved: an expulsion of the Israeli ambassador for Amman, return of the Jordanian ambassador from Israel, cessation of normalization between the countries as well as a re-examination of the peace agreement. Atef Al-Trauna, Speaker of the Lower House, clarified that Israel must be made to understand that their bilateral peace treaty is in danger. He also called for a meeting of the Union of Arab Parliaments in Jordan to discuss Israel's status quo violations.²⁸ The recommendations served as a warning to Israel but were not implemented.

²¹ Ibid, p. 6.

²² Ibid, p. 5.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Report of the Ir Amim Association, p. 1.

²⁵ High Court of Justice 2818/20 Yehuda Etzion and Arnon Segal v. Prime Minister et al., May 18, 2020.

²⁶ Al-Ghad (Jordan), August 14, 2019.

²⁷ Al-Quds Al-Arabi (London), August 19, 2019.

²⁸ Al-Rai (Jordan), 20 August, 2019.

Spring 2021 Riots

Conflicts between Palestinians and Israeli police and authorities developed during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan at the holy compound, the Nablus Gate Plaza and Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in East Jerusalem due to Palestinian reaction to Israeli actions at these three symbolic locations (Navon, 2021; Hasson & Khouri, 2021; Jabarin, 2021). The riots began in earnest on May 6, 2021 when Palestinians confronted police in both the holy compound and Nablus Gate Plaza. Many injuries resulted as the police worked to disperse the crowds. The following morning, some Palestinians who had barricaded themselves inside Al-Aqsa Mosque documented the police force's violent entry into the mosque. In response to the police's use of stun and gas grenades, they threw fireworks and stones while praising Muhammad Deif, the head of Hamas' military wing. Still needing to accommodate Jewish groups to visit the Temple Mount, the police allowed all Muslims into the mosque before locking the mosque doors with the barricaders inside it until the visitors left (Fox & Levy, 2021).

The following day was Laylatal-Qadr, the most important night of Ramadan during which Muslims often pray late into the night in expectation of increased blessings. On this day, Palestinians entered East Jerusalem streets, threw stones at security forces, set fires, and raised Hamas and PLO flags. Many officers and demonstrators were injured. At the same time the police decided to prevent the buses of Israeli Arabs heading to Al-Aqsa for this special night. Muslims saw this as a humiliation and a violation of their right to pray (Fox, Azoulai, & Zaytun, 2021).

On May 9th and 10th, police once again broke into Al-Aqsa Mosque to confront barricaded protestors and were met with stones and firecrackers. On Jerusalem day, the police closed the Mughrabi Gate and did not allow Jewish groups to visit the Temple Mount due to the spillover of violence into the country (Lamuel, 2021). On the following day, the police broke into Al-Aqsa Mosque and captured those who had barricaded themselves inside, once again using stun and gas grenades in this operation. About 300 Palestinians were wounded this time; images generated by this event predictably incited Muslim anger in Israel and abroad.

Jerusalem Day is often marked by a flag parade, a passionate expression of Israeli Jewish nationalism for celebrants (mostly settlers in the West Bank) who convene at the Old City's gates and march together. Prior to this parade, Hamas' military wing issued a public ultimatum to Israel's government, giving them one hour to remove all Israeli forces from Al-Aqsa compound. The police did re-route the flag parade to avoid the heart of the Old City. Eventually, Hamas began launching rockets into Israeli territory—even going so far as to launch them towards Jerusalem area. Security forces then evacuated the parade participants (Brendwein, 2021).

Israel's military Operation Guardian of the Walls in Gaza was the response to Hamas' rockets that day. The IDF targeted many high-rise buildings and senior officials of Hamas' military wing, killing about 300 Gazans, including several dozen civilians. For its part, Hamas launched about 4,360 rockets and mortars into Israel.

Beginning on May 10th, riots spread into Israeli mixed cities where Arabs and Jews reside. About 6,000 Arab Israelis were involved in violent actions against Jews in 520 locations while Jews also responded in violence against Arabs. Several incidents of mutual lynchings took place in addition to an arson attack on a Lod synagogue (Matza, 2021). For three weeks after this, the Temple Mount was closed to Jewish visitors (Cohen, 2021).

Spring 2022 Crisis

The April-May 2022 Temple Mount crisis erupted following a series of terrorist attacks in the West Bank that took place in the two months preceding them, in which 15 Israelis were killed. In response, the IDF launched Operation Breakwater to root out West Bank extremism; the forces killed 27 Palestinian terrorists. King Abdullah

It took the opportunity in a meeting requested by Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz to remind Israel of the need to “respect the right of the Muslim worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque and prevent provocations that would lead to an escalation” (Yehoshua, 2022).

Passover 2022 took place during the third week of Ramadan, when approximately 100,000 to 300,000 Muslim worshippers come to Al-Aqsa. Similarly, many Jewish worshippers visit the Temple Mount during Passover. Like in May 2021, the presence of Jewish religious visitors provoked Muslim ire. Again, young Palestinians barricaded themselves in the Mosque overnight or after the dawn prayer and waited for the 7:30 am arrival of Jewish groups to taunt and throw projectiles at them. The police did not allow Muslims to interfere with Jewish groups’ visits and used force to break up the attacking protestors (Fox & Halabi, 2022).

In April 2022, the Jewish Temple organization “El Hahar” published an ad in which a financial payment would be given to any Jew managing to sneak a goat into the holy compound as a Passover sacrifice in the Temple (Shapira, 2022). It was clear to all Israelis that the police will not allow it to happen, as was the case in previous years in which the police arrested some Jewish provocateurs.

Izat Al-Rishq, a Hamas politburo member tweeted the following: “The settlers’ attempts to invade Al-Aqsa and slaughter victims in its courtyards are playing with fire” (Elihay, 2022). The former mufti of Jerusalem and current preacher, Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, said that

The occupation used the method of betrayal and attacked defenseless worshippers using military methods and firearms. We strongly warn against bringing animal victims to Al-Aqsa. The occupation is trying to empty the worshippers from the mosque to let the settlers make sacrifices.

The above ad agitated the Muslim public, and several dozen young people decided to barricade themselves in Al-Aqsa in order to protect it by throwing stones at security forces. On April 15, Passover eve, policemen broke into the Mosque to stop the impending assault.

During the confrontation in Al-Aqsa, over 150 Palestinians and three Israeli policemen were injured; about 450 Palestinians were arrested. Video clips of the police’s intrusion into the Mosque—taken from the inside—caused an uproar from the general Muslim public and negative reactions from the international community (Fabian, Boxerman, & TOI staff, 2022). A Palestinian girl from Haifa who watched the event in the media emerged from her house with a knife, stabbed and wounded an innocent Jewish passerby. In Umm Al-Fahm, young Arabs also rioted in protest of the police incursion into Al-Aqsa (Elihay, 2022).

On April 17, riots erupted on the holy compound following days followed by rockets from the Gaza Strip. Even a rocket from Lebanon landed in Israeli territory. After these events, the Jordanian Foreign Ministry summoned the Israeli ambassador during which King Abdullah II said that “Israel must stop its provocative and illegal actions at Al-Aqsa” (Abraham, Waldman, & Schneider, 2022). Two days later, Jerusalem’s Waqf Council met. The attendees included the leader of the Northern Islamic Movement, Sheikh Raed Salah, MK Usama Saadi, and Muhammad Barake, the head of the Supreme Follow-up Committee of the Arab Public in Israel. Salah said, “We are heading for a clear struggle between our eternal right in Al-Aqsa and the occupation’s intentions to take over the holy places” (Golditch & Halabi, 2022). Due to the pressure of the events, the Shura Council of the Israeli Islamic Ra’am party opted to freeze its government coalition membership but stopped short of withdrawing (Machoul, 2022).

On April 20th, police denied permission to several hundred right-wing demonstrators who applied to hold a flag march through the sensitive Nablus Gate, but instead allowed them to progress to the Jaffa Gate (Hasson,

Khoury, & Liss, 2022). Two days later, hundreds of Palestinians rioted following the dawn prayer, raising Hamas flags, shooting off fireworks toward the police, and chanting support for Hamas leaders. This time, in addition to their usual riot control tools, the Israeli police used tear gas dropped from a drone. Senior Hamas officials and affiliated media sources took pride in Hamas' "contribution" to these Al-Aqsa compound events. Khaled Mash'al, Hamas' expatriate leader, noted that "It was the Islamic resistance in Gaza that forced the enemy to withdraw its ambitions in Al-Aqsa", and called for establishing an "Al-Aqsa Army".²⁹

On the eve of May 2022 Jewish flag parade, the Palestinian mufti, Muhammad Hussein, published a message in which he stated that "Al Aqsa belongs to Muslims only" and that Palestinians are ready to sacrifice what is dearest to them to protect it, whatever those sacrifices may be.³⁰ Israeli authorities closed the Temple Mount to Jewish visitors until Ramadan concluded on May 1, 2022. On May 5th, Israel's Independence Day, the compound was opened to them as a concession to the increasing tensions. During this time, sporadic riots erupted (Hasson & Khoury, 2022). Hamas leader Ismail Haniye set a new equation between his organization and Israel; the entry of Jews into the holy compound would be considered an escalation.³¹

For the first time during crises surrounding the holy compound, a senior Jordanian official spoke out against Israel. Bisher Al-Hasauneh, the Prime Minister, said "I salute every Palestinian and every worker of the Waqf in Jerusalem who throws stones against the Zionists in defense against the Israeli occupation" (Shabbi, 2022). Moreover, Jordan worked to arouse international public opinion against Israel; Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi talked with heads of the European Union, U.S, Egypt, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates, demanding their intervention in pressuring Israel to keep its forces out of the Al-Aqsa complex. Additionally, the Kingdom demanded the Security Council convene over this issue—all the while denouncing "Israeli aggression" in the public discourse. On April 21, Jordan presided over an emergency meeting of the Arab countries' foreign ministers about the situation in Jerusalem "due to the Israeli escalation". Ministers from Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Algeria attended along with the secretary general of the Arab League, Egypt's Ahmed Aboul Gheit (Khoury & Lees, 2022). The U.A.E. also responded, summoning its Israeli ambassador and strongly condemning Israeli actions at Al-Aqsa. It also initiated the closed discussion in the UN Security Council (Eichner & Levy, 2022).

This time, Israeli leaders traveled to Jordan to coordinate responses. The Israeli Minister of Internal Security, Omer Bar Lev, met with Jordan's Foreign Minister, Ayman Al-Safdi. Both agreed on increasing Waqf guards in exchange for removing "problematic" Waqf people from the holy site (Turgeman & Levy, 2022). The parties also agreed to convene a bilateral committee for Jerusalem affairs (with American involvement) which could promote Temple Mount stability (Ravid, 2022). These understandings, however, were not implemented. U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken spoke with Mahmood Abbas, his Jordanian counterpart, and Yair Lapid, Israel's Foreign Minister in an attempt to settle the crisis. The EU and a number of UN members issued a statement at the end of the UN Security Council's closed session that expressed concern about the security escalation, condemned the terrorist acts and rocket fire at Israel, and called for "maintaining the status quo at the holy sites" (Lees, 2022). After Ramadan ended, the situation returned to calm as Israel did not undertake further actions on the holy compound.

²⁹ <https://palinfo.com>, April 25, 2022.

³⁰ Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, May 23, 2022.

³¹ Hamas warns: The entry of Israelis into the Temple Mount is a reason for escalation, *YNET*, April 21, 2022.

Spring 2023 Events

Since in 2023 Ramadan and Passover crossed again, the Israeli authorities, both political and security forces, prepared themselves for different scenarios, and also consulted Palestinian, Jordanian, and civil society and academic experts in order to prevent escalation. Regional preparations with the participation of the US and European diplomats and security experts were conducted in Aqaba, Sharm al-Sheikh, and Jerusalem.

By the time Ramadan started on March 28th, there had already been several incidents outside of Al Aqsa. Israeli police stopped several Temple seekers carrying animals close to the entrance to the holy complex in keeping with Western Wall rabbi Shmuel Rabinovitch's ban on animal sacrifice (Times of Israel, 2023). The radical Jewish group "Returning to the Mount" published again a call that would award money to anyone arrested while carrying out a sacrifice (Times of Israel, 2023). In response, Muslim worshippers barricaded themselves inside Al-Qibli Mosque "in order to defend it from settlers". On April 5 and 6, Israeli police forces stormed the mosque acting on intelligence that there were weapons inside,³² during late evening prayers and used batons, tear gas, stun grenades, and rubber bullets on the worshippers (UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2023). Those inside used firecrackers and stones in reaction. The UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs reported 43 injured Palestinians and two Israeli police officers. Approximately 440 arrests (many of them Hamas affiliated youngsters) were made during those two days; most of them were arrested inside the mosque. Video clips of police action quickly circulated on Arab social media. The following day, a Palestinian civil society organization tweeted a video of Israeli police walking across prayer rugs and pushing Palestinians off them (Hussain, 2023).

The Al-Aqsa crisis spilled over to uniting armed fronts against Israel and Israelis. During April 4-6, 44 rockets were launched by Hamas from the Gaza Strip towards Israel (Estrin, 2023). Hamas' branch in Lebanon launched 34 rockets to the Western Galilee and three mortar bombs were fired towards the upper north. In response, Israel attacked Hamas targets near Tire in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip during the night.

On April 7, 2023, a Palestinian shooting attack at Hamra Junction of the West Bank killed three Jewish women. Hamas and Islamic Jihad issued a statement praising the perpetrators of the attack, allegedly carried out as revenge for police acts on the holy compound. In the evening, an Italian tourist was killed in a Palestinian stampede attack in Tel Aviv. On April 8-9, 2023 (night), several rockets were launched from Syria towards the southeast of the Golan Heights.

As custodian of the holy compound, the Jordan Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned Israel that attacks of worshippers and "attempts to change the historical and legal status quo in the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque and impose a temporal and spatial division in it" represent a dangerous escalation".³³ The international community was quick to weigh in. The United States National Security Spokesperson, John Kirby remarked that it was "imperative that Israelis and Palestinians de-escalate" (Al-Mughrabi & Abu Mayzer, 2023). While he was celebrating mass, Pope Benedict decried the violence and its effect on dialogue between the two sides" (Ahram, 2023).³⁴ Israel decided not to allow Jewish visitation on the holy compound during the last 10 days of Ramadan, resulting in de-escalation and calm.

³² https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/top-israeli-official-admits-police-overreacted-in-beating-Palestinians-inside-Al-Aqsa/.

³³ Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 5, 2023. <https://mfa.gov.jo/news/34153>.

³⁴ Pope mentioned during mass that renewed violence "threatens the desired climate of trust and mutual respect needed to resume dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians".

The level of tension around the Temple Mount rose again during preparations for the fall Hebrew high holidays due to several developments. Shin Bet director Ronen Bar dissuaded Minister Ben Gvir from visiting the Temple Mount during the holidays (I24 News, 2023). There was a dramatic increase in visitors to the Temple's shines to over 5,000, including Knesset members and yeshiva rabbis. Additionally, worshippers performed several rituals including blowing the *shofar* (a rams's horn signifying the beginning of the Jewish New Year) and the ceremony of Encircling the Gates, which also included dancing including outside the Gate of Mercy on the Muslim cemetery. This drew sharp reactions from Palestine, Jordan, and other Muslim parties who saw it as an "invasion of extremists" to Al-Aqsa. Saudi Arabia issued a strongly-worded condemnation (Kleiman, 2023). In an official memorandum submitted to the Israeli embassy in Amman, Jordan protested the "imposition restrictions on the entry of worshippers to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and giving the extremists the opportunity to attack and desecrate Islamic graves in its vicinity" (Halabi, Cohen, & Azoulai, 2023a). Al-Aqsa Mosque preacher Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, called on worshippers to come en masse to the mosque on Friday and besiege it, due to the "plans to Judaize the mosque" (Halabi et al., 2023a).

In a notable phone call, Shin Bet's director Ronen Bar successful convinced Security Minister Ben Gvir not to go up to the Temple Mount during the holiday; however, the dramatic increase in the number of visitors from the temple shrines (5,323 in Sukkot) including members of the Knesset and yeshiva rabbis and a number of innovations, such as the success of one of the visitors to blow the shofar on the Temple Mount, the Encircling the Gates ceremonies.

In the reactions published by the Hamas movement, it can be understood in retrospect that Hamas sought to use the Temple Mount issue for an attack in the south of the country, which it launched on October 7. Less than a week before, on October 1, against the background of the entry of 748 Jewish visitors to the Temple Mount, a Hamas official called for renewed confrontations with the IDF on the eastern border of the Gaza Strip (Halabi et al., 2023b). Reacting to the visit of Jews to the Temple Mount on October 4, Hamas spokesman Abd Latif al-Kanou said that "Zionist aggression intensifies against Al-Aqsa Mosque in what is known as [Jewish] Sukkot holiday". The organization's senior official Ismail Radwan added: "The Palestinian resistance will not stand idly by in the face of the crimes of the occupation, and all our abilities will be sacrificed for the Al-Aqsa Mosque" (Halabi, 2023). On October 7, the day of Hamas' attack in the south of Israel on the Jewish holiday *Simchat Torah*, the head of its military wing, Muhammad Al-Deif, made a special statement in which he connected the attack to the events at Al-Aqsa Mosque. "We warned the enemy in the past", said Al-Deif, "they attacked the Islamic movement and desecrated al-Aqsa". In his statement, Al-Deif announced that Hamas is launching a military operation which he called the "Al-Aqsa Flood" (Halabi, 2023).

In conclusion, the events of 2023 were a repetition of the events of the past two years with two main differences. This time, the police assumed part of the duties of managing the holy compound by determining Muslims' visiting hours with the aim of exercising Jews' visiting rights. The second change was Hamas movement's use of the disputes in the Al-Aqsa/Temple Mount complex as a psychological weapon to justify a large-scale military attack and to recruit Muslims in Arab countries to its side in the assault.

Analysis and Conclusion

Simply put, the struggle for control of the holy compound reflects the Israeli-Palestinian conflict writ large as the site is a central identity symbol for both groups. The holy compound serves as a lightning rod for draining tensions in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Whatever occurs on the holy compound impacts Israel's relations with

Jordan, the Israeli-Arabs, and other Arab countries. Israel maneuvers between domestic political needs (satisfy religious nationalists and Temple activists), security challenges (rockets from Gaza and Lebanon, terror actions and riots in East Jerusalem and the West Bank), and foreign relations (maintain good relations with Lebanon and other friendly Arab countries).

All crises presented in this article happened because of Israel's domestic considerations—to accommodate Jewish visitors and unilaterally unravel the post 1967 status quo. The police's actions in the compound oscillate from restraint to force, and misjudgments can start riots; the case of the magnetometers illustrated this. In the final estimation, when a crisis breaks out (or threatens to break), the parties abandon their ideologies and political realism takes over. Usually, Israel abandons its domestic and ideological interests and acts to exert its power since it is Israel who initiates the status quo revisions. Once a crisis is over, however, Israel returns to promote the interests of the Jewish activists on the Temple Mount. The fear of violence and damage to its foreign relations are ultimately what cause Israel to abandon its ideology.

Starting in 2021, Hamas succeeded in positioning itself as the leader of the Palestinian struggle and launched rockets in response to Israel's actions at the Al-Aqsa compound. Hamas' intention is to mobilize the Muslim world on its side in the campaign (and attack) against Israel and convincing the Palestinians that it is Hamas and not the Palestinian Authority that protects their rights in the holy place.

Hamas successfully positioned itself as the resistance leader over its rival, the Palestinian Authority, starting in 2021 with its rocket launches tied to Israeli actions at the Al-Aqsa Compound. Hamas aims to mobilize both Palestinians and the Islamic world as it attacks Israel and purports to be Al-Aqsa's protector.

In responding to our major questions presented above, we can conclude that in most of the crises portrayed above, Israel has managed the conflict inefficiently. Not enough was done in order to prevent provocation from both sides to the conflict. Jewish Temple activists succeeded to disseminate their provocation, i.e. smuggling a goat for sacrifice, and not enough was done to prevent fake news on the social media. Due to domestic considerations, the police allowed Jewish visitation during tense days and stormed the mosque time and again in a way that inflamed Muslim anger everywhere in the region. The use of force by the Israeli police developed in two directions. They can curb events by dispersing demonstrations or restricting Palestinians' access to Al-Aqsa. On the other hand, the police's power to control events angers the Palestinians and is itself a source of conflicts. During the May 2021 conflict, the police measures acted as a boomerang. One example of this was stopping buses on route to Jerusalem bound for Al-Aqsa. Another instance was the security forces' breaking into Al-Aqsa to evacuate the protesters. The policy of allowing Jewish worship and visits to the compound at the expense of the Muslims has turned the police into a de facto partner of the Waqf in managing the compound and it supplies ammunition to the Muslims who claim that Israel is dividing the compound.

Conflict management by Israel was successful only when the government restricted Jewish Temple activists and right-wing politicians and restored actions that were taken to safeguard Jewish rights and Israel's sovereign powers. Israel always invoked restrictions too late after violence has already been triggered. However, once Israel took the above steps, calm was restored. International involvement was sometimes needed to restore peace (US intervention in the crises of 2014 and 2015 as an example) which shows that Israel has not only failed to manage—much less resolve—the conflict but also leaves a door open for future crises in the holy compound.

Did Israel succeed in minimizing the negative impact arising from the controversy? Not really. Israel's actions on the holy compound inflame the Palestinians, the Jordanians, the Arab Israelis, and even Arab friendly countries. All believe that Israel violates the status quo and invokes a division of the holy compound. The US

administration finds itself getting involved because they fear regional de-escalation and instability. Another outcome of the crises is that Hamas created a balance of deterrence versus Israel, due to Israel's miscalculation. Since 2021, they appear as the protector and vanguard of Al-Aqsa, while Israel works consistently to weaken the moderate Jordan and the Jordanian Waqf administration of the compound. The weakening of the Waqf creates a vacuum that is filled by extremist Muslim organizations such as Hamas and the Northern Islamic Movement in Israel—to say nothing of the young, unaffiliated Muslim East Jerusalemites.

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