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04.21.22

Israel says no change to status-quo at mosque; 10-day ban on Jewish visits

04.21.22

Israel says no change to status-quo at Jerusalem mosque compound

Police will enforce a ban on Jews entering Temple Mount during the last 10 days of Ramadan beginning on Friday, Foreign Ministry spokesperson says rejecting claim by Arab League ministers that a change to historic practices is taking place
Reuters| Published: 04.21.22, 21:14

Israel said on Thursday it was enforcing a long-standing ban on Jewish prayer at the compound of Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, rejecting an Arab League accusation that it was allowing such worship to take place.

Violence at the compound, revered in Judaism as the Temple Mount and by Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary, has surged over the past week, raising concerns about a slide back into wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israeli security forces have been on high alert with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan coinciding with the Jewish holiday Passover and Christianity's Easter.

The Arab League said Israel has broken the status-quo and was allowing Jews to pray at the compound, calling it a "provocation." Israel, however, said there has been no change in its long-standing ban on Jewish prayer at the flashpoint site.

"Israel is maintaining the status quo, which includes the freedom of prayer for Muslims and the right to visit for non-Muslims. The police enforce the ban on Jewish prayer," said Lior Haiat, a spokesperson for Israel's Foreign Ministry.

"Over the last few years, Israel is not allowing Jews to visit the Temple Mount during the last 10 days of Ramadan to prevent any friction," he said.

That 10-day period starts on Friday.

The future of Jerusalem is at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Old City is in East Jerusalem, captured by Israel in a 1967 Six Day War and annexed in a move that has not won international recognition.

Palestinians want East Jerusalem to be the capital of a state they seek to establish in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

04.21.22

Hamas escalation resumes on Temple Mount seeking a full-blown conflict

04.21.22

Clashes resume on Temple Mount as Hamas warns of escalation

Security forces enter al-Aqsa Mosque compound and use riot control measures to quell unrest; Haniyeh threatens escalation of violence if Israelis continue ascending the Temple Mount

i24NEWS, Elior Levy | Published: 04.21.22, 11:38

Clashes between Palestinian rioters and Israeli police on Jerusalem's Temple Mount resumed on Thursday morning as Hamas warned that Israeli presence at the flashpoint could escalate to a full-blown conflict.

The Israeli forces reportedly fired rubber bullets and tear gas while the rioters hurled fireworks and threw stones at them.

Video showed security forces attempting to confine the rioters inside the mosque.

"As in recent days, this morning at the end of the Fajr prayer, dozens of lawbreakers and masked men rioted and disturbed the order on the Temple Mount with severe violence," a Jerusalem Police spokeswoman said in a statement.

"Early in the morning and later they entered the mosque, closed its doors and continued to disrupt the order with stone-throwing and fireworks and to desecrate the mosque, where they are fortifying themselves at this time."

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh threatened further escalation of violence if Israelis continue ascending the Temple Mount.

"I tell Israel that if it thinks that the incursion of al-Aqsa will change its Islamic identity, it is delusional. What the settlers are doing in the mosque will push for conflict and confrontation on all levels. Just as we defeated the so-called 'flag march', so we will defeat the incursion policy. We are still at the beginning of the campaign," he said, referring to an Israeli ultranationalist rally in East Jerusalem stopped by police on Wednesday for fear of escalating tensions.

Clashes between Arabs and Jews broke out on Wednesday in Jerusalem's Old City and its eastern section following the rally despite the police's refusal to approve the rally, citing security concerns.

The Jerusalem police said that seven suspects from East Jerusalem were arrested on Wednesday night after Molotov cocktails were thrown out of the al-Aqsa Mosque. Police said that one of the Molotov cocktails fell on the carpet of the mosque, sparking a fire that was quickly extinguished.

The violence on the Temple Mount threatens a wider regional conflict as a rocket was launched from the Gaza Strip in southern Israel on Thursday night.

In response, Israeli warplanes struck targets in the Palestinian coastal enclave, attacking a military post and tunnel system, according to the Israel Defense Forces, which later prompted terrorists to fire another rocket salvo.

04.19.22

Thousands march to dismantled settlement; demanding Bennett to choose sides

04.19.22

Thousands march to evicted West Bank settlement in show of solidarity

Settler leaders, right-wing lawmakers and activists join procession to Homesh, calling on government to legalize wildcat yeshiva established at the location

Raanan Ben Tzur | Published: 04.19.22, 22:07

Thousands marched Tuesday to a dismantled West bank settlement in demand that the government legalizes the yeshiva established there, as well as remove the security barricades meant to prevent access to the wildcat outpost.

Large forces secured the march, which was led by Shomron Regional Council head Yossi Dagan, and attended by MKs Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir of the far-right Religious Zionist Party, as well as Yamina MK Idit Silman, who recently resigned from the coalition. During the march to Homesh — a Jewish settlement evacuated by Israel in 2005 — clashes erupted between Israeli security forces and Palestinians in nearby villages.

The march was also attended by the dean of the outpost's yeshiva, as well as the widow of yeshiva student Yehuda Dimantman, who was killed in a shooting attack outside the outpost late last year.

"I am proud to see all the people of Israel ascend to Homesh. We are called extremist settlers, but the Land of Israel belongs to the people of Israel," said Dimantman's widow Ettya.

"Those who think this is not so, there are many other countries and they are welcome to move there. The Land of Israel belongs to the people of Israel. We are not settlers nor extremists, we are just coming home."

Since Dimantman's murder, the yeshiva in Homesh has become a symbol of the settlers' struggle in the West Bank, a fact noted by Ettya, who added, "[Wednesday] morning there will be a barricade here again."

"This government is saying that this country does not belong to us, but to [the Palestinians]. This Passover, [Prime Minister Naftali Bennett] has to choose which side he is on — the side of Israel and the people of Israel, or return to Egypt," she said, referring to the Biblical story of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt.

Smotrich, for his part, lambasted the coalition, adding that he and his party "cannot have a dialogue with those who lament the steps taken by the heroes of Homesh."

Silman said: "It's exciting to be here. I arrived at the invitation of Ettya, who wrote me that whoever lives by the teachings of the Torah, must not give up their truth. I want to tell all teachers and rabbis and parents; there is something greater, and our faith lies with the Lord."

04.19.22

UAE reproves envoy over Temple Mount violence & cancels Israeli celebration

04.19.22

UAE reproves Israeli envoy over Temple Mount violence

Abu Dhabi chides ambassador for what it sees as 'attacks on civilians and invasion of holy places', calls on Jerusalem to kickstart long-defunct peace talks with the Palestinians
Elior Levy, Itamar Eichner | Published: 04.19.22, 21:06

The United Arab Emirates summoned Israeli Ambassador Amir Hayek to protest the recent unrest and violent clashes between security forces and Palestinian rioters on Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

During the talk, Emirati International Cooperation Minister Reem Ebrahim Al-Hashimi gave Hayek a dressing down, and told him that the kingdom was strongly opposed to what it called Israel's "attacks on civilians and invasion of holy places" that injured several civilians.

Al-Hashimi — known for her critical views towards Israel — further underlined the need to provide "full protection" to worshipers and respect the right of Palestinians to perform their religious ceremonies, as well as stop any practice that desecrates the sanctity of the al-Aqsa Mosque.

The minister added that Israel must respect Jordan's role as custodian of Muslim holy places in Jerusalem in accordance with international law and the existing historical situation, and not infringe on the authority of the Waqf — the Islamic religious trust which controls and manages the Islamic edifices on and around the Temple Mount. She also called to kickstart the long-defunct peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians and bring about a two-state solution that will lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Israel seized the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War. The Hashemite Kingdom later relinquished its claims over the territories in the late 1980s. Meanwhile, the Israeli Pilots' Association said on Tuesday that the UAE walked back on its decision to partake in the traditional Independence Day flyby next month. "We regret the decision. The Independence Day flyby with the participation of Israeli airlines will take place as planned immediately after the Air Force flyby and will cross Israel at low altitude," a statement read.

Also on Tuesday, U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken spoke with Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, and Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi in a bid to deescalate simmering tensions around Jerusalem.

During their talk, Lapid stressed that Israel's actions aimed to allow freedom of worship for all religions in Jerusalem despite "the fake news being spread by extremists who incite violence instead of bringing calm."

For his part, Blinken said that the White House understands well the efforts that Israel is making, adding that they will help Jerusalem explain the situation to neighboring countries and in international forums.

04.19.22

Gaza militants prepare defensive and offensive tunnel systems for next conflict

04.19.22

Gaza militants prepare tunnels as next conflict looms

Territory's terror groups counting on the extensive network of underground passageways to seize Israeli personnel or civilians for use as bargaining chips in prisoner exchanges
AFP | Published: 04.19.22, 20:03

In a "tunnel city" under the sandy soils of southern Gaza, Palestinian militants are preparing for the next conflict with Israel, as tensions in Jerusalem threaten to escalate.

The underground passageways leave no trace on the surface.

But in a wooded area near Khan Yunis, seven masked men in military fatigues carried a collection of machine guns and grenade launchers into a tunnel entrance discretely tucked into the foot of a small hill.

The fighters wear headbands of the Al-Quds Brigade, the armed branch of Islamic Jihad which is the second-largest armed faction in Gaza, after the Hamas Islamist movement that rules the territory.

The tree branches covering the hole reveal a narrow passageway walled and topped with concrete blocks.

Complete with electric lights, a ventilation system and telecoms cables, the tunnels also have small rooms for storing weapons and ammunition.

An Islamic Jihad official told AFP during a media tour that the movement has both defensive and offensive tunnel systems.

The latter "is used for taking Israeli soldiers captive, repelling Israeli ground offensives and carrying out various field operations", said the commander.

As he was talking, he received a radio alert of a "security incident" east of Gaza City — a false alarm.

Last May during an 11-day war, Israel launched multiple strikes against what it called the "Gaza Metro", a network of tunnels that had allowed fighters to move around without being spotted by Israeli drones and to take Israeli targets by surprise.

Residents of Gaza, a cramped, besieged coastal territory home to 2.3 million people, have long experience using tunnels since 2007, when Israel imposed a crippling blockade in response to Hamas seizing power in the Strip.

A member of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group sets up a mortar in a tunnel in the Gaza Strip

Smugglers established a network of tunnels on the border with Egypt, enabling them to import everything from desperately needed household goods to cars and even Kentucky Fried Chicken — as well as weapons.

In recent years, Egypt has destroyed most of those tunnels.

Israel, for its part, has boosted its forces around the territory, reinforcing a hyper-secure barrier with an underground steel wall it hopes will prevent tunnels from reaching into Israeli territory.

Israeli commanders fear militants could use such tunnels to seize Israeli personnel or civilians for use as bargaining chips in prisoner exchanges.

But even if Islamic Jihad's tunnels cannot reach Egypt or Israel, they are still "a strategic weapon for the resistance", said Al-Quds Brigade spokesman Abu Hamza.

"We will let the days and the battles to come do the talking about the ability of the resistance to break through this so-called (Israeli) barrier," he told AFP.

Weeks of deadly violence including angry demonstrations and a police crackdown around Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque have prompted Islamic Jihad to threaten an escalation.

After two deadly attacks in the coastal Israeli city of Tel Aviv, the Israeli army carried out large-scale raids in the West Bank, notably the Jenin area from which the attackers hailed.

Those operations sparked intense firefights which killed several fighters from Islamic Jihad, which is supported by Israel's nemesis Iran.

And on Monday evening, a rocket was fired from Gaza into Israel, prompting an Israeli airstrike against a weapons factory.

No faction has yet claimed responsibility, but the incident — the first of its type since January — heightened fears of a further escalation.

A couple of hours' drive from Gaza City, "the tunnels have been repaired and the rocket stocks have been replenished" since last year's war, according to Abu Hamza, who praised Iran for its support.

The spokesman would not be drawn on the size of the organization's tunnel network or how many fighters it has.

But another Al-Quds Brigade source, who asked not to be named, said it had "a large number of offensive tunnels that stretch deep into (Israel) and are linked up to a system of drones".

He said the group also had rockets capable of reaching the whole of Israel.

A short distance from one of the tunnel entrances, a group of fighters sit chatting under the trees.

"We've received instructions to mobilize and be on high alert to defend the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem," said one.

"The rockets are on high alert and we're waiting for the leadership to decide."

04.19.22

Russian ownership of Alexander Nevsky Church, waits for court to convene

04.19.22

Jerusalem landmark crucial to Russia-Israel relations, Kremlin says

Moscow says transfer of Alexander Nevsky Church, promised to Putin by former Prime Minister Netanyahu, 'on the top of the agenda vis-à-vis Russia-Israel relations' and expects Jerusalem 'to provide all the required assistance to complete the transfer of ownership'

Itamar Eichner | Published: 04.19.22, 19:25

The transfer of Jerusalem's contested Alexander Nevsky Church into Russian hands is crucial for Russia-Israel relations, the Kremlin said on Tuesday.

"We expect the Israeli side to provide the necessary assistance for the transfer of the compound to Russia," said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov in regards to the church, promised to Russia by former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as part of a deal meant to secure the release of Naama Issachar, who was imprisoned in Moscow in 2019 for possession of cannabis on Russian soil.

"This issue has been on the top of the agenda vis-à-vis Russia-Israel relations for a long time. We expect the Israeli leadership to provide all the required assistance to complete the transfer of ownership," added Peskov, whose statement comes less than two days after Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly sent a pressing letter on the issue to Prime Minister Naftali Bennett.

Putin's letter — sent amid somewhat strained relations between the two countries, partly due to Israel's support of the UN General Assembly's decision to suspend the Russian Federation from the UN Human Rights Council for its alleged war crimes in Ukraine — was brought to public attention by Sergei Stepashin, former Russian prime minister and head of the association in charge of Russian assets in the Middle East.

Stepashin, amid his visit to Israel, criticized Jerusalem for stalling on the Alexander Nevsky Church dispute due to the war in Ukraine.

"Now we are fighting for the return of the compound, and it is very difficult: We were almost there, we worked for five years, we found all the historical documents, but the situation with Ukraine occurred, and Israel behaved as it often does — playing both sides, playing ping pong with everyone," the Russian diplomat said.

The Alexander Nevsky Church, also known as the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, is a significant asset of the Russian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem, located in the heart of the capital's Christian Quarter.

The land on which the compound stands was originally purchased from the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th century and "the glorious Russian Kingdom" — a name for the Russian Empire that no longer exists today — was registered as its rightful owner. Regardless, Moscow requested in 2017 that Israel recognize the Ottoman designation of the site.

Shortly after offering Putin the Alexander Nevsky Church in exchange for Issachar's release, Netanyahu decided that the dispute over ownership of the Christian landmark could not be resolved in a court of law due to its religious sensitivity. Shortly afterward, Israel's Land Registry Commissioner registered the Russian government as the owner of the landmark.

However, under the Bennett administration, the ruling was handed back to the Supreme Court, which placed the final ruling on hold. A committee was set up in 2021 to determine the landmark's ownership, but it had not yet convened.

04.19.22

US envoy Blinken stresses status quo importance at Jerusalem Muslim shrine

04.19.22

U.S. says Blinken stresses importance of status quo at Jerusalem holy sites

Washington's top diplomat and Jordanian counterpart discuss the importance of Israelis and Palestinians working to end the violence and refrain from escalatory actions'

Reuters| Published: 04.19.22, 18:23

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed recent violence in Israel and the West Bank with his Jordanian counterpart and stressed the importance of maintaining the status quo at Jerusalem holy sites, the State Department said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Secretary Blinken emphasized the importance of upholding the historic status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, and appreciation for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's special role as custodian of Muslim holy places in Jerusalem," spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

Blinken and Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi on Monday also discussed the importance of Israelis and Palestinians working to end the violence and refrain from escalatory actions, he said.

Jordan's King Abdullah — who weeks earlier hosted President Isaac Herzog in a historic visit to Amman — said on Monday that Israel's "unilateral" moves against Muslim worshippers at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque seriously undermined the prospects for peace in the region, state media said.

The monarch, who was speaking with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, blamed Israel for "provocative acts" in the mosque compound that violated "the legal and historic status quo" of the Muslim holy shrines.

On Friday, at least 152 Palestinians were wounded in clashes with Israeli riot police inside the mosque compound, the latest outbreak in an upsurge of violence that has raised fears of a slide back to wider conflict. King Abdullah's Hashemite monarchy has been the custodian of the sites since 1924, paying for their upkeep and deriving part of its legitimacy from the role.

A number of U.S. officials engaged in phone calls with Israelis, Palestinians and Arab representatives in the region over the weekend to see to it that tensions in Jerusalem do not escalate, Price told reporters on Monday.

Tensions this year have been heightened in part by the Muslim holy month of Ramadan coinciding with the Jewish celebration of Passover.

04.19.22

Recently released Radical cleric incited Mosque clashes; Lapid calming tensions

04.19.22

Radical Islamic cleric visits Al-Aqsa Mosque amid tensions

Far-right legislators slam police for allowing Raed Salah, leader of the outlawed northern branch of the Islamic Movement who had been jailed for inciting terror, to arrive at Temple Mount at such volatile time; Lapid cuts Spain vacation short

Ynet| Published: 04.19.22, 15:28

A radical Islamic cleric visited the Al-Aqsa Mosque on Tuesday amid ongoing religious tensions that have so far led to a series of violent clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian rioters.

Despite the tensions, Sheikh Raed Salah, leader of the outlawed northern branch of the Islamic Movement, arrived at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound on Temple Mount with other leaders of the Israeli Arab community in the morning hours.

Salah had recently been released from jail after he was convicted in 2019 of incitement to terror.

The visit drew the ire of far-right legislator Itamar Ben Gvir, who slammed the police for permitting the sheikh's arrival at the compound, while refusing to grant a permit for a right-wing march to take place in the Old City of Jerusalem later in the day.

The Jerusalem police said organizers appealed for the permit too late, and with tensions already high and rioting a near daily occurrence, the force is stretched too thin to provide adequate protection for the march.

Meanwhile, **Turkish President** Tayyip Erdogan said he will be holding a phone call with President Isaac Herzog over what he **believes is an unfair Israeli treatment of Palestinian worshippers at** Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa **Mosque**, Turkey's foreign minister said on Tuesday. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu did not say when the call would take place. Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, vacationing with his family in Spain, said he will cut his trip short and return to Israel following the deteriorating security situation.

Lapid said on Tuesday he had held consultations and was advised of the intelligence, political and security situation.

"I've instructed the **ministry officials to prepare** for the coming days and continue discussions with regional leaders and on all levels, to bring about a **calming of tensions** and to present Israel's actions to allow freedom of worship for all faiths," Lapid said, adding that his consultations also included **preparation for a UN** Security Council meeting on the **situation in Jerusalem**.

Opposition legislators criticized Lapid for vacationing while Israel was facing a security crisis.

04.19.22

Israel strikes Gaza weapons facility in response to rocket fire from Strip

04.19.22

Israel strikes Gaza in response to rocket fire from Strip

Hamas claims it launched anti-aircraft Strela missile at Israeli planes; no injuries reported in strike; IDF attack is first in over three months after Iron Dome intercepts rocket launched - allegedly by Islamic Jihad - for first time since September

Yoav Zitun| Published: **04.19.22**, 07:18

The **Israeli military struck** the **Gaza** Strip late on **Monday** in **response to a rocket** launched hours earlier from the Hamas-controlled enclave, which was **intercepted** by the **Iron Dome** missile defense system.

This was the first strike Israel conducted in Gaza in over three months and the **first rocket** fire aimed at the Israeli territory **since September**.

Israeli air strikes hit camps used by Hamas and another Gaza faction, Palestinian sources said. **No one** was **reported** to have been **hurt**.

The military said one **target was an arms manufacturing site**. "Fighter planes attacked a number of targets and **destroyed a Hamas weapons production facility**," the military spokesperson said in a statement.

"Israel regards **Hamas** as **responsible for all events in and from the Strip**," the statement said.

Hamas Spokesperson Hazim Qasim said that most targets were vacant positions. He also claimed anti-aircraft Strela missile was launched at the Israeli planes for the first time. "Well done to our resistance forces who engaged with the enemy aircraft," Qasim said shortly after the strike.

Earlier on Monday, a rocket was launched from Khan Yunis in the central Gaza Strip towards Israel. There were no injuries or damage reported and no special instructions were given to the local communities.

Palestinian sources said the Islamic Jihad was behind the launch.

The last time sirens were heard in the south was nearly six months ago, during the search and arrest of Islamic Jihad operatives who escaped the Gilboa Prison.

The rocket fire from Gaza came after Palestinians, rioting outside the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, called on the Gaza terror factions to launch rockets at Israel, claiming it was endangering the Muslim holy site.

04.19.22

Russia launches 'Battle of Donbas' on eastern front, linking with Crimea

04.19.22

Russia launches 'Battle of Donbas' on eastern front, Ukraine says

Offensive reported along nearly the entire front where Ukrainians say most of Russia's army is now deployed as part of Moscow's campaign to take two eastern provinces; Kyiv and other cities also under attack from the air

Reuters| Published: 04.19.22, 08:23

Russian forces have launched their anticipated offensive in eastern Ukraine, attempting to push through defenses along almost the entire front line early on Tuesday in what Ukrainian officials described as the second phase of the war.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia had begun the "Battle of Donbas" in the east and a "very large part of the entire Russian army is now focused on this offensive".

"No matter how many Russian troops they send there, we will fight. We will defend ourselves," he said in a video address on Monday.

Zelensky's chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, assured Ukrainians their forces could hold off the offensive in "the second phase of the war".

"Believe in our army, it is very strong," he said.

There was no immediate comment from Russia's defense ministry on the latest fighting. The governor of the Russian province of Belgorod said Ukrainian forces had struck a border village wounding one resident.

Ukrainian media reported a series of **explosions**, some powerful, a **long the front line** in the **Donetsk region**, with shelling taking place in Marinka, Slavyansk and Kramatorsk. Blasts were also heard in Kharkiv in the northeast, Mykolaiv in the south and Zaporizhzhia in the southeast while **air raid sirens** were also going off in main centers near the front line, officials and media said.

Reuters was not immediately able to verify the reports.

Ukraine's top security official, Oleksiy Danilov, said **Russian forces attempted to break through Ukrainian defenses** "along almost the entire front line of Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv regions".

Driven back by Ukrainian forces in the north, Russia has refocused its ground offensive in the two eastern provinces known as the Donbas, while launching **long-distance strikes at other targets including the capital, Kyiv**.

Donbas has been the focal point of Russia's campaign to destabilize Ukraine, starting in 2014 when the Kremlin used proxies to set up two separatist "people's republics" in the ex-Soviet state. It is also **home to** much of **Ukraine's industrial wealth**, including **coal** and **steel**.

Ukraine's general staff said **Russian forces aimed** to establish full **control over** the **Donetsk, Luhansk and Kherson regions**, while intensifying missile strikes in west Ukraine.

Biden to host call with allies

Western countries and Ukraine accuse Russian President Vladimir Putin of unprovoked aggression, and the White House said U.S. President Joe Biden would hold a call with allies on Tuesday to discuss the crisis, including on how to coordinate on holding Russia accountable.

French President Emmanuel Macron said his dialogue with Putin had stalled after mass killings were discovered in Ukraine.

The United Nations said on **Monday** the war's civilian death **toll had surpassed 2,000**, reaching 2,072 as of midnight on April 17 from the beginning of the invasion on Feb. 24. About 4 million Ukrainians have fled the country.

Russia denies targeting civilians in what it calls a special operation to demilitarise Ukraine and eradicate dangerous nationalists. It rejects what Ukraine says is evidence of atrocities, saying Ukraine has staged them to undermine peace talks.

"Hell on earth"

Russia has been trying to take full control of the southeastern port city of Mariupol, which has been besieged for weeks and which would be a big strategic prize, **linking territory** held by pro-Russian separatists in the east **with the Crimea region** that Moscow annexed in 2014 and freeing up the besieging troops.

Video footage showed block after residential block in charred ruins. Shell-shocked residents in the Primorskyi district cooked on open fires outside their damaged homes.

"To be honest, we are not well," one resident named Olga told Reuters. "I have mental problems after air strikes, that's for sure. I'm really scared. When I hear a plane I just run."

The city council said at least 1,000 civilians were still hiding in shelters beneath the vast Azovstal steel plant, which contain myriad buildings, blast furnaces and rail tracks.

Major Serhiy Volyna, commander of Ukraine's 36th marine brigade which is still fighting in Mariupol, appealed for help in a letter to Pope Francis.

"This is what hell looks like on earth ... It's time (for) help not just by prayers. Save our lives from satanic hands," he said in the letter, according to excerpts that Ukraine's Vatican ambassador posted on Twitter.

04.18.22

Jordan calls on Israel to cease attempts to 'change status quo around al-Aqsa'

04.18.22

Jordan calls on Israel to cease attempts to 'change status quo around al-Aqsa'

Amman calls Jerusalem unrest 'reprehensible breach of international law and of Israel's obligations as an occupying power'; Bennett says statement is a 'reward for instigators... trying to ignite violence here in Jerusalem'

Itamar Eichner | Published: 04.18.22, 21:37

Jordan on Monday urged Israel to stop what it calls Jerusalem's attempts to "change the historical and legal status quo around the al-Aqsa Mosque."

In a letter to Israeli Chargé D'affaires Sami Abu Janeb, which he was asked to pass on to the government posthaste, Amman called Israel's actions around the mosque "a reprehensible breach of international law and of Israel's obligations as an occupying power" and stressed the need to respect the rights of worshipers at the Jerusalem shrine.

The Foreign Ministry, in response, said that Amman's actions "harm efforts to bring about quiet in Jerusalem and provide backing to those who are damaging the sanctity of the holidays and are using violence which endangers the lives of Muslims and Jews alike."

The ministry further stated that "Israel is maintaining the status quo and expects all of its partners to condemn extremists partaking in incitement and violence."

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said on Monday that he takes seriously "statements that accuse Israel of the violence directed at us" and called it "a reward for instigators, chief among them Hamas, who are trying to ignite violence here in Jerusalem."

He further stated that Israel will "continue to grant and maintain the dignity of all, to allow everyone to celebrate in Jerusalem, and first and foremost - our forces will continue to provide security to the citizens of the State of Israel."

Meanwhile, the United Nations Security Council will meet on Tuesday over the recent unrest in Jerusalem, AFP reported, citing diplomatic sources.

Earlier on Monday Foreign Minister Yair Lapid held consultations on a response to

Diplomatic sources familiar with the discussions said that the Jordanian minister's actions were only serving to further stoke tensions around the capital and put lives at risk.

"Instead of heating things up, it is expected of the Jordanian foreign ministry to escalate the situation and respect religious freedom to all peoples. It is a shame that Jordan chooses only to focus only on Israel and fails to condemn the rioters' behavior," the sources said.

Israel claimed it made great efforts to allow freedom of worship to Muslims and Jews alike on the Temple Mount, and even allowed worshippers to stay at al-Aqsa through the night for the practice of I'tikaf unlike in previous years.

However, some faithful did not respond to Israel's overtures in kind and collected stones at the mosque overnight to hurl at security forces the next day, alongside the firing of fireworks.

Meanwhile, Jerusalem claims that the Waqf — the Islamic religious trust which controls and manages the Islamic edifices on and around the Temple Mount — is unable and unwilling to deescalate the situation at the volatile flashpoint.

Although relations between Jerusalem and Amman have improved greatly under the current Israeli government, the two countries are standing on the precipice of a full-blown diplomatic crisis due to Jordan's vehement condemnation of the Temple Mount riots and the Hashemite Kingdom's decision to reprimand the Israeli envoy over the events.

Meanwhile, Jordanian Prime Minister Bisher al-Khasawneh on Monday praised the rioters during a parliament session.

"I praise the Palestinians and the members of the Jordanian Islamic Waqf who stand guard proudly, and those who throw stones and the Zionists who desecrate the al-Aqsa Mosque with the support of the Israeli government," he said.

Bennett said on Sunday that Israel is working to maintain peace and religious freedom, but it will not come at the expense of security.

"Security forces have a free hand to calm the situation on the one hand, and to thwart any attempt of violence on the other. Security forces are prepared for any scenario."

04.18.22

Iron Dome intercepted Gaza rocket; PA warns rescinding relief escalates tension

04.18.22

Rocket fired from Gaza, intercepted over border communities, IDF says

Launch comes amid high tensions around Jerusalem's Temple Mount and ends a seven-month lull around Palestinian enclave; no injuries or damage to property were reported

Ynet| Updated: 04.18.22, 21:27

A rocket was launched from the Gaza Strip into Israel and intercepted over communities bordering the Palestinian enclave, the Israeli military said in a statement Monday evening.

"A few minutes ago, sirens sounded in the area surrounding the Gaza Strip. One rocket was fired from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory," the statement read. "The rocket was intercepted by the Iron Dome Air Defense System."

No injuries or damage to property were reported. This is the first rocket launch from the Gaza Strip into Israeli soil since last September.

Rockets fired from the Gaza Strip landed in the Mediterranean Sea off central Israel on New Year's Eve. It was not clear whether the rockets were meant to hit Israel, but Gaza-based militant groups often test-fire missiles toward the sea. There were no reports of casualties.

Earlier on Monday, the leader of the Gaza-based Islamist group Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) Ziad Al-Nakhala warned that Israel's threats to rescind relief for the residents of the seaside territory in the event of escalation due to escalating tensions in Jerusalem "will not silence" the organization.

Meanwhile, the IDF beefed up its presence and rocket defense systems around Gaza. Rocket sirens also sounded around Gaza border communities Sunday evening, but the IDF reported it was a false alarm shortly after.

04.18.22

Putin assured Abbas; to provide PA & Mid-East food security; waving fist at Israel

04.18.22

Putin discusses Russia-Ukraine talks, Middle East with Palestinian leader Abbas
Ramallah claims Russian president expressed his opposition to Israeli actions around Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque and assured Abbas of Moscow's support of Palestinians in all international forums

Reuters, Elior Levy | Published: 04.18.22, 18:19

Russian President Vladimir Putin held a phone call with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas about negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, the Kremlin said on Monday.

The phone call may come as a dig at Israel after Prime Minister Naftali Bennett put his mediation efforts between the two Eastern European warring factions on ice to tackle a political crisis back home as his coalition lost its majority in the Knesset.

The call also comes one day after Putin fired off a letter to Bennett on Sunday demanding a Jerusalem landmark be immediately transferred into Russian hands.

They also talked about "the problems of the Middle East settlement in the context of escalating tensions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem", the Kremlin said.

Last Friday, at least 152 Palestinians were wounded in clashes with Israeli riot police inside the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, the latest outbreak in an upsurge of violence that has raised fears of a slide back to wider conflict.

According to Abbas' office, Putin expressed his opposition to Israel's actions around the mosque, as well as the abridgment of the freedom of worship, and assured the Palestinian leader of Russia's support in all international forums.

The Russian president also said that Russia will provide the Palestinians and other countries in the Middle East with all their food security needs, including wheat and other crops. He also said that Russia will make every effort to reach a solution with Ukraine through negotiations.

Former Israeli ambassador to Russia Zvi Magen suggested on Monday that Jerusalem better ignore Moscow's actions to avoid further straining the relationship between the two countries.

"On the ground, everything is calm and the cooperation [between Israel and Russia] is upheld," he said. "If they stop cooperating with us on the ground, and start waving concrete fists around our region, then we'll have to respond. At the moment, it is clear that this is an internal-political problem and we will come out of it as we did before."

04.18.22

Amman letter; Israel must stop attempts to change legal status quo of al-Aqsa Mosque

04.18.22

Lapid mulls harsh response to Jordan's condemnation of al-Aqsa unrest

Diplomatic sources say Amman's one-sided rebuke of Israeli forces only serves to further stoke tensions around Jerusalem flashpoint and put lives at risk instead of deescalating the situation

Itamar Eichner | Published: 04.18.22, 17:47

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid on Monday held consultations on a response to Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi's condemnation of Israel for the recent clashes between security forces and rioters on Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

Diplomatic sources familiar with the discussions said that the Jordanian minister's actions were only serving to further stoke tensions around the capital and put lives at risk.

"Instead of heating things up, it is expected of the Jordanian foreign ministry to escalate the situation and respect religious freedom to all peoples. It is a shame that Jordan chooses only to focus only on Israel and fails to condemn the rioters' behavior," the sources said.

Israel claimed it made great efforts to allow freedom of worship to Muslims and Jews alike on the Temple Mount, and even allowed worshippers to stay at al-Aqsa through the night for the practice of I'tikaf unlike in previous years.

However, some faithful did not respond to Israel's overtures in kind and collected stones at the mosque overnight to hurl at security forces the next day, alongside the firing of fireworks.

Meanwhile, Jerusalem claims that the Waqf—the Islamic religious trust which controls and manages the Islamic edifices on and around the Temple Mount—is unable and unwilling to deescalate the situation at the volatile flashpoint.

Although relations between Jerusalem and Amman have improved greatly under the current Israeli government, the two countries are standing on the precipice of a full-blown diplomatic crisis due to Jordan's vehement condemnation of the Temple Mount riots and the Hashemite Kingdom's decision to reprimand the Israeli envoy over the events.

Meanwhile, Jordanian Prime Minister Bisher al-Khasawneh on Monday praised the rioters during a parliament session.

"I praise the Palestinians and the members of the Jordanian Islamic Waqf who stand guard proudly, and those who throw stones and the Zionists who desecrate the al-Aqsa Mosque with the support of the Israeli government," he said.

Amman sent a letter to Israeli Chargé D'affaires Sami Abu Janeb, which he was asked to pass on to the government posthaste, stressing the need to respect the rights of worshippers.

The letter also stated that Israel must stop its attempts to "change the historical and legal status quo around the al-Aqsa Mosque" and calls Israel's actions around the mosque "a reprehensible breach of international law and of Israel's obligations."

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said on Sunday that Israel is working to maintain peace and religious freedom, but it will not come at the expense of security.

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Ynet-News, Apr 18, 2022 – Monday

04.18.22 – Mo- - - News

Jordan summons Israel envoy & praise the PA Waqf who guard mosque from Zionists

04.17.22 – Su- - - News Placed in Apr 17 spot – Sunday

Egyptian Intelligence Directorate Mahmoud el-Sisi to mediate Israel and Hamas

04.18.22 – Mo- - - News Placed in Apr 18 spot – Monday

Putin demands ownership of Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, in Jerusalem Old City

04.17.22 – Su- - - News

Moscow summons Israel envoy over Lapid & Bennett suspending Russia from UN

04.17.22 – Su- - - News

Ra'am party temporarily halts coalition partnership; Knesset on recess until May

04.17.22 – Su- - - News

Mofti blames Bennett of fake news escalating violence; calls for UN to intervene

04.17.22 – Su- - - News

Ra'am party told by Mufti to leave coalition; if coalition resigns, Bennett will fall

04.17.22 – Su- - - News Placed in Apr 16 spot – Saturday

Palestinians riot on Temple Mount, buses hit in stone throwing attack

04.17.22 – Su- - - News

PA rioters on Temple Mount, throwing stones at three buses injured five passengers

04.15.22 – Fr- - - News Placed in Apr 15 spot – Friday

Police clash at Temple Mount; PA throwing fireworks & stones toward Western Wall

04.14.22 – Th- - - News Placed in Apr 13 spot – Wednesday

Iran warns Israel; too small to confront us; Gaza calls escalation to defend Mosque

04.14.22 – Th- - - News

The government coalition can hold until next Passover and beyond, Lapid says

04.14.22 – Th- - - News Placed in Apr 14 spot – Thursday

Police arrest 4 Jews planning to sacrifice Passover offering on Temple Mount

04.13.22 – We- - - News

IDF nab West Bank fugitive on his way to attack Israel; PA plan Passover conflict

04.12.22 – Tu- - - News Placed in Apr 12 spot – Tuesday

Senior Turk says Iran threatens Israel & Turkey; we should forge cooperation

04.12.22 – Tu- - - News

IDF deploys two battalions & two companies to reinforce West Bank 40 km barrier

04.12.22 – Tu- - - News

Manhunt underway for gunman who shoots 10 in New York City subway car