

Israel shuts Jerusalem Al-Aqsa mosque compound after unrest

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Tue, 2019-03-12 16:35

JERUSALEM: Unrest at a highly sensitive Jerusalem holy site led Israeli police to shut off access to it on Tuesday after several weeks of tension at the location.

Police said they evacuated the Al-Aqsa mosque compound after a Molotov cocktail damaged a police post.

Video spread online of scuffles between police and Palestinians before the site was cleared.

More than 10 people were arrested, police said, while the Palestinian Red Crescent reported two people hurt.

A police officer suffered from smoke inhalation, police said.

Police said they found a number of firecrackers and Molotov cocktails in searches of the site.

Residents said police were also restricting Palestinian access to Jerusalem's Old City, where the site is located.

Worshippers later prayed outside the locked gates of the site in protest.

Jordan, the custodian of the site, condemned its closure as "unacceptable."

Abdul Nasser Abul Al-Basal, Jordanian minister of Islamic affairs, told state-run Al-Mamlaka TV that the closure was an "attack on religious freedom."

The compound is the third-holiest site in Islam and a focus of Palestinian aspirations for statehood.

It is also the location of Judaism's most sacred spot, revered as the site of the two biblical-era Jewish temples.

Jews are allowed to visit but cannot pray there and it is a frequent scene of tension.

It is located in east Jerusalem, occupied by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed in a move never recognized by the international community. Recent weeks have seen scuffles over a side building at the site known as the Golden Gate.

Palestinian worshippers have been entering the site despite an Israeli order that it should stay closed.

Access to the Golden Gate was closed in 2003 during the second Palestinian intifada over alleged militant activity there, police say.

Palestinian officials argue that the organization that prompted the ban no longer exists and there is no reason for it to remain closed.

Israel and Jordan are believed to be holding discussions to resolve the issue.

Police have filed a request with Israeli courts for an order to re-close the building, but the court has reportedly delayed any decision to allow for more negotiations.

There are concerns in Israel that tensions at the site could boil over and become a political issue ahead of April 9 Israeli elections.



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[Al-Aqsa Mosque](#)

[Jerusalem](#)

Israel arrests Muslim cleric at Al-Aqsa Muslims pray in banned area of Al-Aqsa for first time since 2003

[Palestinian who attempted knife attack shot dead by Israeli soldiers](#)

Author:

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1552392964255956500

Tue, 2019-03-12 12:03

RAMALLAH, GAZA: A Palestinian who ran at Israeli troops with a knife in the flashpoint city of Hebron in the occupied West Bank on Tuesday was shot dead

by soldiers, Israel's army said.

The Palestinian health ministry confirmed the death but provided no details on the incident, saying only the "Israeli occupation opened fire on him."

The incident started near an Israeli military post, the army said.

"Soldiers identified a terrorist armed with a knife running toward them," a spokeswoman said.

A physical confrontation followed, "then he ran toward a nearby building while still armed with a knife," she said.

"The soldiers then fired toward him, thwarted the attack and he was killed."

No soldiers were wounded, the spokeswoman said.

Palestinians have launched sporadic attacks against Israeli forces and settlers in the West Bank.

Israeli forces have been accused of responding with excessive force in some instances.

Tensions run particularly high in Hebron, where several hundred Israeli settlers live in the city center under heavy army protection among around 200,000 Palestinians.

It is also the location of a key holy site known to Muslims as the Ibrahimi Mosque and to Jews as the Tomb of the Patriarchs.

In Gaza, a Palestinian shot by Israeli forces in clashes on the border nearly two weeks ago has succumbed to his wounds, the enclave's health ministry said Tuesday.

Mousa Mohammed Mousa, 23, was injured on March 1 in clashes along the border, ministry spokesman Ashraf Al-Qudra said in a statement.

He told AFP Mousa had been shot in the back east of Al-Bureij in central Gaza.

For nearly a year, protesters have been gathering along the frontier in often violent protests calling for Palestinian refugees and their descendants to be allowed to return to former homes now inside Israel.

Israeli officials say that amounts to calling for the Jewish state's destruction, and accuse the Gaza Strip's rulers Hamas of orchestrating the protests.

At least 255 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire since the movement began in March 2018, the majority shot during weekly border demonstrations and clashes.

Others have been hit by tank fire or air strikes in response to violence from Gaza, including projectiles fired at Israeli towns and incendiary kites

targeting farmland across the frontier.

Two Israeli soldiers have been killed over the same period.

Israel and Hamas, which has controlled the blockaded Gaza Strip for over a decade, have fought three wars since 2008.



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Palestinian wounded in Israel border clashes dies: Gaza ministry
Suspected Palestinian thief shot dead by Israel police

[Dope-dealing ring on messaging app busted in Israel](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2019-03-12 11:10

JERUSALEM: Israeli police said Tuesday that undercover officers had broken up a drug-dealing network that used a popular messaging app and had connections in the United States, Ukraine and Germany.

"After several months of covert investigation 42 suspects were this morning detained in Israel and abroad for questioning under caution on suspicions of trafficking various types of drugs," a police statement said.

It said the transactions amounted to "hundreds of millions" of Israeli shekels (tens of millions of dollars/euros).

The suspects, the statement added, traded through the encrypted messaging app Telegram.

Police designated the ring "Crime Organization 420" and published its organizational chart, with one person at its head and a hierarchy of executives for finance, infrastructure, security and development, among others.

The statement did not give any names and did not link the suspects to the Israeli drug marketplace Telegrass, which uses Telegram.

Israeli public radio, however, said that Telegrass founder Amos Dov Silver was among those arrested.

The radio said that the suspects allegedly dealt not only in marijuana but also ecstasy and cocaine.

It said that Silver, a dual Israel-US citizen resident in the United States, was arrested in Ukraine and Israel would request his extradition.

The Telegrass website carried a message in Hebrew on Tuesday describing it as a "black day."

"Hope you never know how much it hurts to get up in the morning to find out that your friends have been arrested," it said.

"That their homes were turned upside down, that they were treated worse than animals, that their little children were frightened in the middle of the night with dogs and violent shouts."

A police spokesman could not immediately be reached for comment.

"Wages for staff and managers of the organization were transferred in cash, in bitcoins, or drugs, while concealing the source of the funds," the police statement said.

Officers of the Israeli police cyber-crime unit worked with Ukrainian, US and German law enforcement, it added.



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French drug suspect faces death penalty in IndonesiaSaudi official vows to help fight drug abuse in Sri Lanka

[US plan for military deployment costs worries Turkey](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-03-11 22:32

ANKARA: The US plans to demand that allies hosting American troops cover the full cost of their deployment and pay an additional amount, Bloomberg reported on Friday.

The idea, which US President Donald Trump has floated for months, has raised concerns in fellow NATO member Turkey, where American troops are stationed in the Incirlik air base, 250 miles southeast of Ankara.

Analysts say the plan may cause a further deterioration in US-Turkish relations, and may trigger a debate in Turkey about whether the presence of American troops is desirable.

In a separate move, the Pentagon recently warned Turkey that it could be banned from buying the US F-35 and Patriot defense systems if it goes through with plans to buy Russia's S-400 air defense system.

Ziya Meral, senior resident fellow at the British Army's Center for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research, said Turkey's Incirlik is used by the US for its own purposes, not to defend Turkey.

If Washington implements its plan regarding deployment costs, "it would add fuel to the fire of voices in Turkey asking Ankara to put an end to the US presence in Incirlik," Meral told Arab News.

Combined with the crisis over the S-400s, and strained US-Turkish relations, he said it may trigger a strategic rift that would be the final nail in the coffin of bilateral ties.

"This would not only harm US military operations and reach in the region ... but would also be a major win for Russia and a blow to NATO's integrity," he added.

Incirlik has been in use since December 1954, when Turkey and the US signed a joint-use agreement. It was also used by coalition forces during the first Gulf War for combat missions over Iraq.

The base is currently home to the 39th Air Base Wing of the US Air Force, and holds B61-type hydrogen bombs.

In 2015, Turkey authorized the use of the strategically important base as a launching pad for aerial operations by the US-led anti-Daesh coalition in Syria. The base is believed to host about 2,000 American service members.

Calls to close it, especially by Turkish nationalists, have increased recently as relations between Ankara and Washington have deteriorated.

Ankara has warned several times that it would consider denying the US access to the base, which has also been used as leverage against Germany.

After Turkey refused to permit German MPs to visit the base, Berlin decided to relocate its military planes from Incirlik to Jordan in 2017.

Prof. Serhat Guvenc, from Istanbul's Kadir Has University, said Jordan's Al-Asrak air base has always been seen by the US as an alternative to Incirlik.

"It wouldn't provide similar advantages like the Incirlik air base, but the US may renounce its presence in Turkey considering the increased political burdens," he told Arab News.

Asking Turkey for a premium for the presence of US troops on its soil is a non-starter, he said.

"In that case, Ankara may either request that the US leave its soil completely, or decrease its military presence to a minimum," he added.

But Oubai Shahbandar, a defense analyst and fellow at the New America think tank's International Security Program, said US military cooperation with Turkey in Syria will be as crucial ever with Daesh's defeat.

"Iran-backed militias in Iraq want to close down the US Al-Asad air base in the Iraqi desert, which could make Incirlik as important as ever to support kinetic strikes against Daesh terror remnants," he told Arab News. A satisfactory deal will eventually be reached between Washington and Ankara, he said.



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Turkey lambasts US move to end special trade status Turkey dismisses US warning over S-400 Russian missiles

[Algeria's President Bouteflika says he](#)

will not stand for fifth term and postpones election

Mon, 2019-03-11 20:36

ALGIERS: Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika bowed to widespread protests on Monday by announcing he will not seek a fifth term and delaying next month's presidential election.

After 20 years in power, Bouteflika made the dramatic move in a letter to the Algerian people released by his office. He promised an interim leadership structure to plan new elections, and said he will not seek to run again.

Bouteflika, who is 82, has barely been seen in public since a 2013 stroke. He has faced unprecedented protests in recent weeks demanding that he abandon plans to seek another term.

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President Bouteflika returns to Algeria amid fresh protestsPresident

Bouteflika returns to Algeria amid fresh protests