

## **What You Need to Know About the Conflict in Israel**

For the last two weeks, fighting has raged in the Middle East, as the Israeli Defense Forces, under the orders of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have responded to attacks by the terrorist group Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip and enjoys close links with Iran. A less military but no less brutal conflict has been waged concurrently within the United States, as “Progressives” within the Democratic party have fought to push the party into condemning Israel and siding with its Iran-linked foes. Under this pressure, President Biden has demanded Netanyahu “deescalate” the conflict as if it is possible for Israel to do so unilaterally. For what it is worth, Netanyahu and his Cabinet have complied by approving a cease-fire in a fight thrust upon them. This has not gone far enough for New York Congresswoman Alessandra Ocasio-Cortez, who is leading a fight to block arms sales to the Jewish state.

### **What is the official cause of the fighting?**

The official story is that fighting broke out when Israeli police moved to enforce an eviction order on 22 Palestinian tenants in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. The land was purchased by Jewish settlers in the 1880s, and Jews moved into the area only to be driven out after the 1947-48 war of Israeli Independence. While Israeli forces were victorious overall, the West Bank fell to Jordanian forces. Despite having ostensibly fought the war against Israel for Palestinian rights, Jordan annexed the West Bank and expelled the Jewish inhabitants. Rather than turning the land over to Palestinians, the Jordanian government nationalized all formerly Jewish-owned land, and in fact, evicted the Arab tenants of the previous Jewish owners under the premise that they were “Zionist collaborators.” Instead, the Jordanian government settled insurgents who would launch attacks on Israel along with their families.

In 1967, Israel defeated Jordan in the Six-Day War and reoccupied the West Bank, including Sheikh Jarrah. Israel’s government took over ownership of all Jordanian government land. In 1982, the Jewish owners sued to recover ownership. They won, but on the condition that they allow the Arabs residing to remain as protected tenants provided they paid rent. Starting in the mid-2010s, a number of the local Arab tenants ceased paying rent, at which point the owners sought an eviction order. After years of wrangling, an order was issued in 2020 and acted upon in May of 2021. Those affected were a mere 22 Arab households, a majority of which appear to have already moved.

Regionally and internationally, anti-Israel forces portrayed the move as an act of ethnic cleansing, designed to replace an Arab population with a Jewish one. Ignored was that the Jews had held original ownership, and the Arabs in question had not only failed to pay rent but were not the initial Arab inhabitants anyway, as having leased land from Jews prior to 1948 was grounds for confiscation for any Arabs unfortunate enough to be “liberated” by their compatriots. Nonetheless, “Save Sheikh Jarrah” has become something of a PR buzzword for anti-Israeli forces internationally.

### **What happened next?**

Mobs of armed Palestinians descended not just on Sheikh Jarrah but on Jerusalem itself from all over the West Bank. None had any links with the village or the dispute, and fighting broke

out after they attempted to block Jews from praying at the Western Wall near the Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount. Hamas, an Iranian-linked group that controls the Gaza Strip, a non-adjacent territory that Egypt controlled from 1948-1967, began firing rockets into Israel, targeting civilians.

### **Why did this fighting really start?**

Sheikh Jarrah did not matter to either Fatah, the political party of former Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat which rules the West Bank under current Palestinian “President” Mahmoud Abbas, Hamas, or Iran. All, nonetheless, had reasons for desiring an outbreak of violence in May of 2021.

Fatah had been forced to call Palestinian elections for the first time since 2006. Initially scheduled for May 22, 2021, they have now been indefinitely postponed. Abbas justified the postponement as a response to recent events, declaring, “Facing this difficult situation, we decided to postpone the date of holding legislative elections until the participation of Jerusalem and its people is guaranteed.” The reality is that Abbas had been looking for an excuse to cancel them for months. Abbas felt he had found one when he demanded Israel allow Palestinians within Jerusalem to take part, expecting Israel to reject the terms. Instead, the European Union succeeded in mediating an agreement whereby Palestinians in Jerusalem would be able to cast ballots at European diplomatic posts. Frustrated, Abbas seems to have seized on Sheikh Jarrah after his previous ploy to stir up conflict over Jerusalem was foiled by Israel and the EU. The EU definitely believes this to be the case, mincing no words in its condemnation.

Hamas also condemned the cancellation, calling it “a coup against the path of national partnership and consensus.” Hamas understandably was upset, as the organization expected to do well in the elections, if not win them. Nonetheless, Hamas, an extremist group whose charter calls for the destruction of Israel, provided Abbas with cover by launching its own campaign of terror against Israeli civilians.

Hamas has close links to Iran, and Iran’s regime has every reason to wish to see tensions rise. Ironically, the motivation lies in the behavior of the Biden Administration. It is noticeable that the United States under Joe Biden has been absent from this tale so far. The European Union interceded to mediate over the Palestinian elections and the European Union, which took a strong stand against the behavior of Fatah. The United States under Joe Biden might as well not exist as far as Israel and the Palestinians were concerned.

The Biden Administration has been very active when it comes to Iran, trying aggressively to restore the Obama-era “nuclear agreement” whereby the United States dropped sanctions in exchange for Iran “pretending” to slow down nuclear enrichment. Ironically, the aggressive wooing by the Biden Administration, especially special envoy and former Secretary of State John Kerry, has proved an irritation for Tehran. Tehran never fully complied with the terms anyway, which did not stop Obama from dropping sanctions, and those sanctions were never fully reimposed despite Iran repudiating the deal. As Iran currently enjoys freedom from sanctions and the right to enrich uranium, it is unclear why they would want to be forced back into such an agreement.

Whatever the delusions of the Biden administration and the American left, the Iranian government does not wish for closer ties with an America it sees as immoral and decadent. Iranian hardliners—who are ascendent after having crushed all remaining dissent that erupted last fall and having rigged their parliamentary elections—see American friendship as a greater threat than American hostility as they fear the cultural “corruption” of young Iranians. Ironically, the rise of “woke culture” in America has actually made Iran’s Mullah’s more determined to keep out corrupting American influences.

Their challenge is that most Iranians favor closer ties with the United States and the Western world. The Iranian people are not hardline Islamists and wish to end Iran’s isolation. Therefore, relations with Washington function as a wedge issue in Iranian domestic politics, an issue on which the vast majority of Iranians differ from their radical and dictatorial regime. The regime, therefore, needs to ensure that no reproachment with the United States ever occurs, yet has to create the impression for the Iranian people that the blame for poor relations and hostility lies with Washington, not their own leaders. Over the last twenty years, the result has been a counter-cyclical process where American overtures to Iran trigger Iranian atrocities abroad whether through Hamas, Hezbollah in Lebanon, or Iraq, and subsequent American hostility is then met with feigned injury by Iranian leaders.

John Kerry and Joe Biden do not seem to understand this. Instead, their aggressive wooing in the lead-up to Iranian elections has forced the Iranian government to take action to ensure that the United States has no choice but to crack down on Iran. The means Tehran seems to have settled on is unleashing Hamas. By having Hamas launch repeated attacks on Israel, Iranian leaders can force Biden to recall the ridiculous Kerry and cease his futile efforts, which force the Mullahs to take political risk rejecting his unwanted overtures.

### **Domestic Useful Idiots**

If Biden and Kerry fail to grasp how their indifference to Israel and stalkerish approach to an Iran which wants nothing to do with them has triggered violence, Tehran and Hamas seem to have reckoned with a force even more incapable of grasping a hint. Ocasio-Cortez, Tlaib, Omar, and other squad members have reacted to Hamas’ behavior, not by rallying to Israel’s defense, but rather by rallying to Hamas’ side and demanding that Biden turn on Israel and offer more concessions to Hamas and Iran.

Like Kerry’s overtures, these suggestions completely miss the point. As noted, neither Fatah, which wants an excuse to postpone elections indefinitely nor Hamas and Iran, which want the US to halt its campaign to restore the Obama-Iran deal, cares about any Israeli concessions or desire any kind of long-term settlement. They need the violence for their own ends, and they need the violence to polarize. Thus if the US cracks down on Israel, America will not just be abandoning its ally. It will achieve the opposite of a reduction in violence—instead, Fatah, Hamas, and Iran will decide they need to engage in even more violence to achieve their desired outcome—as none of them has any interest in their people viewing the United States or Israel with anything less than hatred.

For American progressives, of course, this is not really about the reality of Israel, Palestine, Hamas, or Iran. For the American left, the conflict is about the abstractions of critical race theory and a world of black and white where Israel is a “colonial power,” and the very success of the Israeli people makes them suspect unless they display proper contrition and guilt.

### **What Next?**

The good news is that the current violence should stop when the key protagonists get what they want. That means no Palestinian elections and no Iran deal. For all Biden’s urging of Netanyahu to deescalate, Netanyahu has already agreed to a cease-fire. An actual cessation of violence requires the cooperation of the other party, and toward that end, Biden should make clear that

1. No Palestinian Government, including Hamas, will receive US aid
2. The United States will not hold any talks with Iran until it stops aiding attacks on Israel

The first would ensure that the Palestinian elections cannot threaten Fatah and give Abbas a reason to call off his agitation. The latter would likely keep Iran quiet, at least for the next month and a half. Absent this, Biden’s blandishments to Netanyahu will be meaningless if Hamas and Iran ignore Israel’s proffered cease-fire.

In the longer run, Biden needs to engage with the real world. Dump day-dreamers like Kerry realize that Iran does not want to be his friend and that Israel is not his enemy. Hamas and Fatah are terrorist mafias and the oppressors of Palestinians, not spokesmen for the oppressed. The world is full of dangerous men willing to kill and cause violence for their own ends. Biden, through a mixture of gullibility and indifference, has helped to enable them.