

What has happened?

- On Friday 14th July, two Israeli Police Officers, Hael Sathawi and Kamil Shanan, were killed after they were attacked next to the Lions Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem, near the entrance to the Temple Mount. The three attackers, who were from Umm el Fahm in Israel, were armed with Carl Gustav style automatic weapons and an automatic pistol.
- While it was initially thought that the weapons had been stored inside the Temple Mount compound, subsequent video evidence demonstrated that they were smuggled in by the attackers and an accomplice. The attackers entered the Old City through Herod's Gate individually with an accomplice carrying a bag with weapons entering afterwards. They came to the Temple Mount through the Gate of Remission before entering the Al-Aqsa Mosque with weapons, leaving the Mosque to change clothes, and then returning to the Temple Mount with the weapons hidden on them and killing the officers. They were shot and killed in an exchange of fire with Israeli police officers next to the Temple Mount.
- Following the attack, Jerusalem Police Commander, Yoram Halevy evacuated the Temple Mount compound in order for the crime scene to be properly examined. It represented the first time Israel had closed the compound on a Friday in nearly 50 years.
- The police subsequently opened two gates to Muslim worshippers at 13:00 on Sunday 16th and another three on Monday 17th. Extra security measures were installed, including metal detectors and additional CCTV. Although members of the Waqf – the Islamic trust that administers the site – objected to the installation of these security measures and refused to enter the site, several hundred worshippers went through the metal detectors and prayed on the Temple Mount.

Sporadic scuffles broke out between security forces and Muslim protesters who were trying to prevent other Muslim worshippers from going onto the site.

- Violent altercations between police and worshippers have taken place throughout the week as Muslim clerics and Waqf officials began praying outside the Temple Mount in protest against the introduction of metal detectors. Over one hundred people have been injured in clashes and firebombs, stones and fireworks have been launched at police officers in the Silwan and Issawiyah neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem.
- Senior Jerusalem clerics have called for the closure of all mosques throughout Jerusalem on Friday and threatened to hold a mass prayer service at the gates to the Temple Mount. On Thursday, the IDF announced that it was putting five additional battalions on alert in the West Bank and the police are expected to deploy three thousand additional officers around the Old City on Friday morning.
- The White House has said it was “very concerned” and has called on Israel and Jordan “to make a good faith effort to reduce tensions and to find a solution that assures public safety and the security of the site and maintains the status quo”.

What is the status quo on the Temple Mount and is it being undermined?

- During the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount which is a holy site to both Jews and Muslims. Under the terms of the ‘status quo’ which was established following the war, the site is managed by an Islamic foundation (Waqf) with Israel controlling access and security. Non-Muslims have access and visiting rights

but are forbidden to pray on the Mount. Jordan, which controlled East Jerusalem from 1948-67, serves as custodian of the holy site.

- Palestinians argue that the installation of metal detectors undermines the status quo on the Temple Mount. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has cut short his trip to China in light of the “Al-Aqsa crisis” and members of Fatah mobilising to encourage street-level resistance. Arguments about altering the status quo feed in to rumours peddled by extremist Palestinian preachers and the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel who for years have claimed that Israel is planning on destroying the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

- Israel has emphasised that it has no intention to alter the status quo at the holy site and claims that the metal detectors prevent terror and are not dissimilar to other measures at other holy sites. For many years the Mughrabi Gate, where non-Muslim visitors enter the Temple Mount, has had a metal detector and there have been metal detectors and armed guards at the Western Wall for many years. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said: “We want to solve this crisis in the quietest way possible and restore calm. We talk with the Arab world and we explain that there is absolutely no change to the status quo.” He has also emphasised that “the installation of metal detectors does not constitute any change in the status quo. It is only meant to prevent a repeat of an attack with weapons”.



- Israel has also pointed out that in other Muslim holy sites around the world, CCTV camera and metal detectors have been installed. In Mecca there are more than 5,000 CCTV cameras and over 100,000 people employed to provide security during the annual Hajj.
- President Reuven Rivlin spoke to Turkish President Recep Erdogan on Thursday and reiterated that Israel respected the status quo on the Temple Mount.
- In 2016, an Israeli-Jordanian agreement to install cameras on the Temple Mount in order to prevent the hoarding of Molotov cocktails and stones that has been thrown from the site broke down following Palestinian opposition.

international inspectors or to remove the metal detectors and instead install CCTV cameras inside the Temple Mount compound.

- Ultimately, much will depend on the extent of the expected violence following Friday's prayers. On the assumption that a significant escalation is avoided, it is expected that a joint Israeli-Jordanian committee with representatives from the Waqf will be formed to devise security arrangements for the Temple Mount that are acceptable to all sides. This committee would not only address the issue of the metal detectors at the entrances, but also the implementation of the 2016 agreement about placing closed circuit security cameras in some parts of the Temple Mount compound, which was never implemented by the Waqf.

The debate between Israeli security officials

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- On Thursday, government ministers and security officials met with Prime Minister Netanyahu following his return from Europe in order to decide whether to keep or remove the metal detectors placed at the entrance to the Temple Mount. According to reports, officials from the Shin Bet, IDF and the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) expressed reservations about the continued use of metal detectors while the Israel Police and Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan insisted they remain in place. A Police statement read: "There's no other way of ensuring effective inspection to prevent weapons from being brought into the Temple Mount."
- The security cabinet ultimately decided to "authorise the Israel Police to make any decision in order to ensure free access to the holy sites, while upholding security and public order". Reports suggest that the police have decided the detectors will stay in place for the time being, and they will use their discretion over who needs to go through them.

What now?

- Some suggestions raised over the past week include the removal of the walk-through metal detectors and holding selective screening with handheld wands for worshippers deemed suspicious. Another compromise reportedly being considered is for the metal detectors to be operated by

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