

Welcome to The Jews Are Tired, your podcast about Jewish News. I'm Lev Gringauz.

Normally I start this podcast with a music-based, typical podcast-y opening. This time I decided against it because it just doesn't feel appropriate, and I'd like to save a few seconds on an already long episode by getting right to the point.

The past week has been hell in Israel and in Gaza. It has been a hell of rockets and airstrikes and fear and death and chaos for Jewish Israelis, Palestinians, and Arab-Israelis. Everyone has something to say about it, some conclusion they want you to reach and believe in across Instagram, Twitter, and wherever else.

Problem is, most people don't know much about Israel, the Palestinian territories, and how things got to be this way. And increasingly, many people don't want to listen, because they think being told that it's complicated is just a gaslighting tactic; an easy way to make them feel stupid and to get them to shut up. Or people don't know where and how to start learning, when they feel pressure to have an opinion right now about Israel and Gaza.

So I decided to do something with this episode that, frankly, is probably a bad idea that everyone will ignore in favor of twitter: A big timeline of the past month of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, covering several layers of what happened and, to the best of anyone's knowledge, why it happened.

It's not an explainer for the whole conflict, it's not an overly extended opinion about solutions to the conflict and one-state vs two-state. It's my attempt to slow down and explain the big picture of what's happening right now for the people who want to know and feel like they don't know enough. Like many things on this podcast, it's an attempt to put all the main information in one spot for you, so you don't have to go swimming through endless articles and videos and tweets to piece together the long arc of events.

Some facts will be given broader context. Others I will let speak for themselves, uncomfortable though that may be. It's not perfect, but nothing ever is when telling the story of conflict. I just hope you find this episode helpful, both in understanding the complex overlap of issues that define the conflict, and in deciding for yourself what conclusions you want to reach. And you know, you are probably going to hear some buzzwords you don't like, for example, "clashes" and "tensions." Common terminology for this stuff is not great, but I don't want to spend time arguing about terminology, I want to get to the point.

So let's start with Jerusalem, and with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which began on the evening of April 12.

Jewish-Palestinian tensions already took a turn for the worse because Israeli police blockaded the steps that lead to the Damascus gate, one of the gates of the Old City of Jerusalem in East Jerusalem. The steps, and the plaza by the gate, are kind of a mini colosseum, it's an open area and part of the social life of Muslim Palestinians during Ramadan. Palestinians protested the public space being shut down. About a week later, the police removed the barricades on the steps, but kept up a heavy presence in the Old City and around the Temple Mount, on top of which is the Al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam where many many Palestinians come to pray during Ramadan.

Something to understand — and to be clear, again, this is not justification, but this is one of the things that does need to be understood — Ramadan in Israel is typically a time when violence flares up, often in the form of terror attacks by Palestinians against Jews. So the police were on edge. However, many analysts of Jerusalem and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict agree that blocking the steps of the Damascus gate was a bad move that could only inflame the tension in the city. And it did.

Over the course of April and Ramadan, another trend emerged: Young Palestinians recording themselves harassing and attacking Orthodox Jews and posting the videos on tiktok.

In response, groups of young Jews went out to pick fights with Palestinians, and even attacked some Israeli journalists. A Jewish supremacy group called Lehava (Le-Ha-VA), very well known as a far-right anti-LGBTQ anti-Palestinian and even anti-Christian organization, also organized a march of young Israeli Jews into the Old City of Jerusalem. The march is notable for participants chanting "death to Arabs," who ended up getting in a fight with Israeli police who tried to keep the Jewish participants of the Lehava march away from a group of Palestinians who were there to take a stand against the Lehava march. Police ended up clashing with both groups.

Alongside all this was another issue: The case of Sheikh Jarrah, a neighborhood in East Jerusalem where several Palestinian families, some of whom have lived there for around 70 years, face eviction. Some pro-Israel activists and the Israeli government (or rather, what little of the government remains after four national elections in under two years) claim that the issue of Sheikh Jarrah is just a private real estate dispute that has been blown out of proportion. That's just plain wrong.

Sheikh Jarrah, also known in Hebrew as Shimon HaTzadik, is one of those spots with a real complicated background. Sheikh Jarrah was developed in the second half of the 1800s as an Arab neighborhood with a Jewish section. The Jewish section was built near a spot considered to be the tomb of a famous Jewish high priest of the second temple period named Shimon HaTzadik, or Shimon the Righteous. The property, though, was owned by Arabs until in 1876, when a Sephardic, or North African Jewish, organization teamed up with an Ashkenazi, or European Jewish, organization, to buy it. And so the Jews kept living there.

But then comes the Israeli War of Independence in 1948, when Israel was declared a state and then five Arab countries declared war on Israel. The Jews in Shimon HaTzadik were evacuated during the war, and by the end of it, the entire area of Sheikh Jarrah was captured by Jordan, which had taken control of the West Bank and of East Jerusalem.

At this point, Jordan and Israel both faced a similar problem: You had a bunch of people who fled their homes and properties now living in enemy territory. For Jordan, Israel was the enemy territory, and for Israel, everything outside of Israel was enemy territory. And this meant you had a lot of property now sitting around without any owners or residents, because Arabs and Palestinians had fled Israel and Jews had fled the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza.

So Jordan and Israel thought up basically the same solution. They created laws that allowed the state to take control of these properties that were deemed to have absentee owners. And then the state could do whatever it wanted, like, say, resettle refugees on property that was claimed under this kind of law.

That's what Jordan did with Shimon HaTzadik. In the 1950s, Jordan made a deal with the UNRWA, the United Nations refugee agency focused only on Palestinians, to settle about 30 Palestinian refugee families there, in an apartment complex developed by Jordan. The families gave up their right to receive UNRWA aid, though they still qualified as refugees, and rented apartments and the use of the property from Jordan. The rent wasn't like, real, though, it was a symbolic one Jordanian dinar every year, and if the Palestinian families went back to their homes in what is now Israel, Jordan would take control of the property again.

But then comes the Six Day War in 1967, another war between Israel and several Arab countries where Israel conquered land held by Jordan, Egypt, and Syria. In Jordan's case, Israel took control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem — and as a result, Israel took over ownership of the property of Shimon HaTzadik. Then in 1970, Israel passed a

law that allowed property owned by Jews in 1948 that was conquered by another country, to be restored to them. So now that the Jewish state held the property, the two Jewish organizations that bought the land in 1876 went in with the 1970 law in hand to reclaim ownership.

And they did reclaim it under the law. In 1982, these two Jewish organizations then sued the Palestinian families living on their property in Sheikh Jarrah. The attorney for the Palestinians negotiated an agreement where the families would be classified as “protected tenants,” so if they paid rent then they couldn’t be evicted, basically. The families didn’t start paying rent.

So under Israeli law, here’s the dispute in Sheikh Jarrah: Palestinians living there have not paid rent to the owners of the property, and therefore several courts in recent years have ruled that the families should be evicted. The Israeli Supreme Court was scheduled to decide on May 10 this year whether to uphold those rulings or allow an appeal. It has to be noted, that in this particular case, it’s about the eviction of four families. Other cases having to do with other families in the area are also working their way through the courts. And again, these are families who have lived there for 50 to 70 years, so even with four families that still means many family members, or people, are at risk of being evicted.

Here’s the Palestinian side on that. The families in Sheikh Jarrah say the 1982 negotiated agreement that made them “protected tenants” was done without their consent and understanding. They tried several times to vacate the agreement, including in the 1980s, with no success. So they don’t hold that they have to pay rent, and they refuse to recognize Jewish ownership of the property. You also have the broader context of the legitimacy of the 1970 law that allows Jews to reclaim property lost in 1948...but not Palestinians. There have been legal issues around that law for decades, with several Israeli Attorneys General saying it shouldn’t be used at all.

There’s also the fact that the two Jewish organizations that owned the property sold it in the early 2000s to an organization called Nahalat Shimon International, which exists specifically to push more Jews into Sheikh Jarrah and more Palestinians out of Sheikh Jarrah. This is part of a wider trend of policies and private organizations that have been pushing, with some success, to force Palestinians out of East Jerusalem, the area of the city where they mostly live, and make Jerusalem as a whole as Jewish as possible.

So what could, technically, be called a private real estate dispute is actually deeply tied into the politics of making Israel and Jerusalem Jewish. And to the Palestinians, staying in Sheikh Jarrah is their stand against the ethnic cleansing of Jerusalem. Side note, let’s

just say out loud that a lot of Jews are going to cringe at the use of the phrase “ethnic cleansing,” but if you’re going to engage with how the quote-unquote “other side” views this situation, you can’t shy away from the way they describe it.

If you want to keep throwing more complexities into this already complex issue, the Jewish settlers trying to take territory in East Jerusalem argue that they are undoing the ethnic cleansing of East Jerusalem and the West Bank of Jews by Jordan. Jews were not allowed in the Jordanian West Bank, and their property was confiscated by the Jordanian government. None of this is fun, the language isn’t either.

By the way, most of this history is taken from a 2010 report from the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies which is very detailed, and very available at a link in the podcast notes.

So combine alllll of that with rising tensions in Jerusalem during Ramadan over the past few weeks. Palestinian protesting and rioting is driven by police presence, and by protests against the eviction of families in Sheikh Jarrah, which also turned violent with the snowball of police showing up with tear gas and water cannons, and Palestinians throwing rocks, which can, and do, kill people. For many years, by the way, nonviolent protest by a small group of Palestinians and leftist Jews and Israelis was the norm at Sheikh Jarrah. But everything escalated this time.

Then we hit May. In early May, three yeshiva students were shot in a drive-by shooting in the West Bank. For those who may not know, a yeshiva is like a university of Jewish learning, tradition, and thought. One of the students died of his wounds. And the Israeli Defense Forces, Israel’s army, went looking for the perpetrator. While in the West Bank searching, IDF soldiers clashed with Palestinians and fired on them, resulting in a Palestinian 16-year-old being shot dead. Allegedly, the 16-year-old had nothing to do with the Palestinians facing off with soldiers, he was just in the area and was hit by bullets fired by IDF soldiers. The IDF eventually found the perpetrator of the drive-by shooting.

So more gasoline is poured on the fire. Jews are angrier. Palestinians are angrier. Both are driven by these deaths. The Palestinian conflicts with Israeli police start happening on the Temple Mount, the holiest site for Jews and the third-holiest site for Muslims. In Jewish tradition, the Temple Mount is where the two temples stood, of which the Western Wall is a ruin from the Second Temple. In Muslim tradition, it’s where the Prophet Mohammad ascended to heaven, and where, as a result, the Al-Aqsa mosque is.

So Palestinians stockpiled rocks and fireworks on the Temple Mount and threw them at police, prompting the police to come in and do their version of crowd control, which included throwing stun grenades into the Al-Aqsa mosque. Starting around May 8, and over the course of the next several days, hundreds of Palestinians are injured on the Temple Mount. Anger increases exponentially at the sight of Israeli police and stun grenades violating, as the Palestinians see it, the Al-Aqsa mosque.

Busses of Arab-Israelis and Palestinians from Northern Israel, who are on their way to pray at Al-Aqsa for Ramadan, are blocked from getting to Jerusalem by Israeli police, increasing anger, even after the road is unblocked after three hours. Muslims left the busses and walked on foot around the barricades to get to Jerusalem. This was done by police in the name of crowd control, by the way.

Then on May 10 was Jerusalem Day, when Israeli Jews celebrate the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967 and gaining access to the Old City and the Temple Mount again. As part of that celebration, thousands of right-wing Jews have a tradition of marching through the Old City of Jerusalem from the gates to the Temple Mount. Thing is, they purposefully do the march through the Muslim quarters in order to antagonize and terrorize the Palestinians. Obviously, this would not have helped the growing conflict. And at the last moment, literally minutes before the march was planned to start, police said the march wasn't allowed to go through the Muslim quarter, but could go through the Jewish quarter instead. Also, the Israeli Supreme Court ruling on the Sheikh Jarrah evictions was delayed for at least a month, so as not to add to the already overwhelming conflict.

The organizers of the Jerusalem Day march cancelled the march. Jewish right-wingers went on ahead with it anyway. Israeli police also banned Jews from going up to the Temple Mount to try and avoid more conflict. But more conflict did break out on the Temple Mount between Palestinians and the Israeli police. Allegedly, some fireworks aimed by Palestinians at the Jews near the Western Wall accidentally hit one of the trees on the Temple Mount, setting it on fire. So by evening, there was a pretty clear image to incite more anger from Palestinians and Arab Israelis against Jews: The Temple Mount, a center of holiness, was on fire.

At this point, a new player entered: Hamas, the terrorist organization that controls the Gaza strip. Now we get to what has been mostly going on this week. And if you thought there was a lot to cover until now, don't worry, there's still more to know.

Hamas, along with Palestinian Islamic Jihad, another terrorist organization in Gaza, started firing rockets from Gaza into Israel. First toward Jerusalem, and then toward

southern and central Israel. This isn't exactly a new thing. There have been periods, like in 2012 and 2014, where this devolves into open war between Israel and Hamas. But since the devastating war in 2014, there have been smaller scale conflicts lasting a few days at a time. Hamas will fire rockets at Israeli cities near Gaza, and Israel will do airstrikes against Hamas positions in Gaza. After a few days, Egypt negotiates between Israel and Hamas and the rockets and airstrikes stop.

Usually, Hamas has kicked off these smaller conflicts and negotiations with Israel for some concrete purpose, like negotiating for Israel to let more international aid into Gaza, which Israel is often reluctant to do because most of that aid goes to benefiting Hamas and not Gaza as a whole. But this time, it's all political. Palestinians were supposed to be having elections right about now for their national parliament and president. But then Mahmoud Abbas, the current Palestinian president, cancelled the elections in late April.

Abbas is from the Palestinian Fatah party, which leads the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and which is in competition with Hamas. Abbas cancelled the elections because Fatah is afraid that Hamas would win the elections and take control of the West Bank, too. Abbas, by the way, has been serving a four year term as Palestinian President since 2005, which is the last time Palestinian national elections were held.

So without elections, how do you fight for political legitimacy among Palestinians? Well, you become the defender of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa and take a powerful stand against the Israeli oppressor. So that's what Hamas did as they saw the situation heat up in Jerusalem. The moment they fired rockets, they took over the conversation. Hamas is now the defender of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa. Hamas is doing something. Whereas Fatah and President Abbas are doing nothing. So Hamas wins political points.

And having done their something, Hamas also blew away any real conversation about what is actually happening in Jerusalem. As heavy waves of rockets came down over the past few days, Israelis ran in fear to bomb shelters, listening to different kinds of booms. Some of the booms were Hamas rockets being intercepted in midair by smart missiles from the Iron Dome, an Israeli defense system funded by the United States under the Obama Administration. Some of the booms were Hamas rockets falling onto unpopulated areas. Some of the booms were the Hamas rockets that made it through the Iron Dome's 90% interception rate, and hit populated areas.

In Gaza, Palestinians also listened to different kinds of booms. There's the boom of Israeli airstrikes on Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad targets. The boom of rockets being launched from Gaza. The boom of the Iron Dome. The boom of many of the

rockets launched from Gaza falling short, and landing in Gaza. Anecdotally, Gazans tell journalists and family members and post online that this is among the heaviest Israeli attacks they've ever experienced.

But in their fear, Palestinians have nowhere to go for safety. They have no bomb shelters. They have no Iron Dome. Much of Gaza is still rubble from previous wars and conflicts with Israel, which tries to reduce widespread casualties and damage. Over the past few days, Israel dropped flyers to warn Palestinians to evacuate buildings that were going to be hit with airstrikes. The IDF called building managers in Gaza to coordinate evacuations to reduce casualties.

Every person killed or hurt or traumatized is a tragedy, and many Israelis and Palestinians have been killed, including children. But more have been killed, and are being injured, in Gaza. Twenty-eight children, just children, are dead in Gaza out of 119 total deaths as of the time I record this podcast. 9 Israelis total are dead.

Hamas, with the resources to build a massive arsenal of rockets, could have invested those resources into Gaza, and bomb shelters, and rebuilding. Hamas could have not fired the rockets that lead to Israeli airstrikes. Hamas could not build rocket launchers and their military infrastructure into civilian areas, making it impossible to attack without high risk of killing innocent Palestinians. Some critics of Israel argue that rockets are the only way to get attention for Palestinian suffering anymore, and that Israelis are basically fine because they have the Iron Dome, so it's disproportional for Israel to respond by attacking Hamas and Gaza and causing so many Palestinian deaths.

Israelis and pro-Israel activists say Israel is doing everything it can to reduce deaths, and that Israel has a right to defend itself against attacks. Many of those killed in Gaza are members of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Some of the innocent civilians dead in Gaza were killed not by Israel but by the Gaza rockets that fell short and landed in Gaza. Israel has refused to consider a ceasefire, while Hamas has, even if only for show, offered a few ceasefires through third-parties like Russia.

Online, every one of these factoids is getting drawn into a social media proxy war for whether to support Israel, support Palestinians, wish for peace for both, or assume one side or the other should just stop existing entirely. At the same time, antisemitism around the world always increases when Israel and Hamas fight, and there are already increased reports of Jews and Jewish institutions in places like Great Britain and Germany being targeted in the name of Palestine.



While people internationally debate which facts about the Israel-Hamas fight they want to subscribe to and to which degree they want to do so, Israel faces a greater threat: A collapse of civil society.

As hundreds of rockets were fired from Gaza this week, Arab-Jewish relations in cities across Israel broke down. Driven by the same escalating tensions that consumed Jerusalem, egged on by years of incitement in Jewish society against Arabs and in Arab society against Jews, long boiling because of widespread issues of crime and poverty in Arab Israeli society that Arab Israeli leaders had been begging the Israeli government for years to help with.

Arab mobs in cities like Lod have brutally attacked Jews and burned synagogues. Jewish mobs in cities like Bat Yam have brutally attacked Arabs and destroyed Arab-owned shops. The police have been, for the most part, helpless to stop the violence. Politicians, even some far-right Jewish politicians who are known for inciting hatred against Arabs, spoke out against the chaos. And even if this only lasts a more few days, a perception of Arab-Jewish trust and tolerance in Israeli society that had recently grown has been significantly damaged.

Which all brings us to the final piece of the puzzle, which is Israel's political situation. Four national elections in under two years have led to no stable long-term government in, well, over two years. It seemed like Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was going to finally be removed by the formation of a new government with a different prime minister, perhaps even two different prime ministers. But over the past week, the front of alternative political parties and leaders trying to get rid of Netanyahu broke down, as a Jewish right-winger decided against any chance of partnering with an Arab Islamist politician given the current chaos. Now it looks like Israel might go to a fifth round of national elections, this time not with a parliamentary voting system but with a direct vote for prime minister.

So Netanyahu, on trial for corruption and unable to form a stable government through parliamentary politics, might get to hold on to power by having Israelis vote directly for him to keep it. And it's not for no reason that many analysts speculate that Hamas may have initiated this latest round of fighting partly to help Netanyahu stay in office. In the late 1990s, Netanyahu became Prime Minister for his first time by capitalizing politically on a wave of terror attacks in Israel. Now, Hamas seems to prefer a trusted and known Israeli enemy to a new and less predictable one. It's also thought that the Israeli government and Netanyahu being in total disarray right now left little oversight of the Israeli police in Jerusalem, helping to lead to the spread of conflict there.

But all that definitely veers into speculation, and not known fact. What is known is that while, generally speaking, Netanyahu's time as Prime Minister in the 2010s has been quieter for Israelis than previous decades, Hamas has grown more entrenched in Gaza and more able to overwhelm Israel's Iron Dome defense system and hurt more Israelis in that time. For a photo of what that looks like, check out a link in the podcast notes to a tweet with a photo of the Iron Dome facing off against Hamas rockets. See it for yourself.

So where does all of this lead us? The answer is, I don't know. What comes next? If you need a pick-me-up, there's a link in the podcast notes to a JTA story about how Arab-Jewish coexistence organizations have responded to the violence in Israeli cities. But beyond the general hope that things get better, that a ceasefire is reached sooner rather than later and that no more lives are lost, I don't know where this leads us. I don't think anybody knows.

Now, based on all this, what side should you pick to be on? I can't answer that for you either. I've got personal views, obviously. But this episode isn't for me to go into that. There are enough people online and in the world happy to tell you what to think. I just prefer that even if we reach different conclusions, we all have a common conversation based on reality — the messed up, multilayered, complicated reality that is Israel and the Palestinian territories. And how horrible that reality is sometimes to the people who live there.