

Jewish and Arab neighbors torn apart by violence in East Jerusalem

by [Michele Chabin](#) in the [November 25, 2015](#) issue

Just one narrow street divides the Arab village of Jabel Mukaber from the Jewish neighborhood of Armon Hanatziv in East Jerusalem. But the gulf between the two communities seems impossible to bridge these days.

Although relations have not been warm, they have worsened dramatically recently. The current round of violence between Palestinians and Israelis began in mid-September over tensions at a Jerusalem site sacred to both Muslims and Jews. Since then, confrontations have increased. As of the end of October, 11 Israelis had been killed, mostly in stabbings, while 55 Palestinians, 35 of them identified by Israel as attackers, were killed by Israeli fire.

Each side blames the other for starting the trouble. Arab residents say protests broke out over Israel's plans to impose sovereignty and restrictions over the Temple Mount, the location of the Al Aqsa mosque, which is considered the third holiest site in Islam. Residents of the Jewish neighborhood say the false allegation is a rumor spread by Palestinian leaders to foment riots and a string of terror attacks against Jewish people across Israel.

Arab residents who don't condone the attacks say they understand the frustration behind them. Jerusalem's Arab youths "don't have any hope. They feel Israel is trying to take over Al Aqsa," said Jabal Mukaber resident Inad Sourghi, a father of six children, ages five to 16.

Sourghi said anger over Israel's alleged takeover of the site comes on top of resentment over Israel's spreading settlements on land that Palestinians consider theirs. "They see settlers living up the hill on [four acres] of our family's land," he said, referring to the Jewish residents of Armon Hanatziv and Nof Zion, Jewish neighborhoods built on land "confiscated from Arab landowners," according to Peace Now, an Israeli peace group.

"How can our children not be angry?" Sourghi asked, saying that city services provided to Arabs are "far worse" than those provided to Jewish neighborhoods.

“Palestinians in East Jerusalem pay the same national and municipal taxes as Jews in West Jerusalem but receive a fraction of the services,” said Daoud Kuttub, a Palestinian media expert. “A visit to Jabel Mukaber and the Armon Hanatziv settlement is enough to show clearly the huge disparity between Arabs and Jews in what is considered the united capital of Israel.”

Kuttub said that for many Palestinians “the last source of hope is religion. And when that was tampered with by Israeli right-wing ministers calling for the destruction of Al Aqsa and the building of the Jewish temple in its place, the people’s patience burst and the result is what we are seeing today.”

Some of the men implicated in recent attacks come from Jabel Mukaber, whose residents, like much of the world, do not recognize Israeli sovereignty over East Jerusalem, territory Israel captured from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War and which Palestinians claim as the capital of any future Palestinian state.

Armon Hanatziv residents say these attacks, as well as dozens of instances of rock throwing, windshield shattering, and firebombing carried out by Palestinian teens, have frightened them. Since an attack on a public bus in which several passengers were stabbed to death, few Jews venture to the shops on the Arab side of the street, despite the contingent of border police recently stationed nearby.

Gil Schechter, a Jewish father of four whose apartment complex is across the street from several single-family Jabel Mukaber homes, said frustration is no excuse for violence.

He recalled how teenagers from Jabel Mukaber threw Molotov cocktails at his home on the night of July 31.

“Our garden was destroyed, and it’s a miracle the firebomb didn’t burn the house down,” Schechter said, showing a municipal surveillance video of the arson attack on his tablet. “It started during the summer of 2014 with demonstrations where people carried Hamas flags and shouted ‘Death to the Jews.’ The third intifada started right here. That’s what Arabs are calling it, and as far as we’re concerned this is a war against us and the people of Israel.”

In July 2014, Jewish extremists kidnapped and burned Muhammad Abu Khdeir, a 16-year-old from Jerusalem’s Shuafat neighborhood. In the wave of outrage after the boy’s killing, Palestinian youths clashed with Israeli security forces in East Jerusalem.

Schechter said his children, ages four to 17, “no longer play outside or ride on buses for fear of being knifed.” Earlier this month a 13-year-old Arab boy stabbed a 13-year-old Jewish boy riding a bicycle.

Israel, he insisted, “is not changing the status quo on the Temple Mount. And the municipality, recognizing the decades of neglect in East Jerusalem, has put tens of millions of shekels into improving the schools and paving the roads and cleaning up the garbage.”

Iris Israeli, Schechter’s next-door neighbor, said her grown children, who live outside Jerusalem, will not allow her grandchildren to spend the night with her, fearing for their safety. She and her husband, Amiram, moved to their home in Armon Hanatziv 40 years ago, when the view from her garden apartment consisted of Jabel Mukaber’s olive trees. Her house lies just outside a tall mesh fence the government built to protect the home of other neighbors after villagers threw 17 Molotov cocktails at them.

“We’re literally living on the edge,” Israeli said, looking out at her Arab neighbors’ homes from her garden. “This street is the only thing that separates us from the village.”

Attacks also took place recently on the West Bank, including knife attacks on Israeli soldiers. This summer, extremist Israeli settlers set fire to a Palestinian family’s home, killing three people. In October an extremist settler assaulted and attempted to stab Arik Ascherman, head of Rabbis for Human Rights, as he led a protest against the destruction of olive trees.

In the village of Jabel Mukaber, Sourghi said he has “good relations” with Jews, Christians, and Muslims despite the violence and split over land rights.

“We all have one God,” he said. “There are extremists on the Palestinian side and the Israeli side.”

He prays for the day when East Jerusalem will be in Palestinian hands, not Israeli ones, but insisted: “I won’t send out my children to die in order to achieve this.” — *USA Today*; Religion News Service; added sources

*This article was edited on November 12, 2015.*