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Heavy police presence blocks anti-Israel protest in Brooklyn from reaching Crown Heights

Police officers headed off an anti-Zionist demonstration that made the Jewish neighborhood its intended destination.

By [Joseph Strauss](#) April 29, 2025



Police block pro-Palestinian supporters from entering a neighborhood with a large Orthodox Jewish population on April 28, 2025, in Brooklyn. (Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

An anti-Zionist demonstration targeting Crown Heights that had alarmed local Jews and drawn heightened police activity petered out on Monday night, as dozens of protesters meandered around Brooklyn without even reaching the intended neighborhood.

The protest was framed as a response to [unrest that engulfed the area](#) surrounding the Chabad Hasidic movement's headquarters last Thursday, in which pro-Palestinian demonstrators protested a visiting far-right Israeli politician, Itamar Ben-Gvir.

In an incident that was caught on video and went viral, a crowd of Jewish counter-protesters surrounded and harassed a woman who was being escorted from the scene by a police officer. Photos also circulated showing a pro-Palestinian protester with a bloodied face.

On Monday, as news of that incident spread, a flier circulated online calling for a pro-Palestinian protest in Crown Heights billed as “Flood Crown Heights,” with the slogan “Zionism is not welcome here.” Another post called for attacks on Jews.

In anticipation, police bolstered their presence in the heavily Jewish neighborhood. Local Jewish organizations urged their constituents not to confront the protesters, though one militant right-wing pro-Israel group vowed to do just that.

That group, Betar, [tweeted](#) videos on Monday evening of their followers gathered together, and ready to oppose “pogroms.”

But they needn’t have. Police never allowed the pro-Palestinian protesters to get anywhere near Chabad headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway.



Pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian demonstrators are kept apart by police during a rally in which the pro-Palestinian group was prevented from entering Crown Heights, April 28, 2025, in Brooklyn. (Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

Beginning at 7 p.m., about 50 pro-Palestinian protesters gathered outside Barclays Center, surrounded by dozens of NYPD officers. The plan was to protest there before embarking on the 45-minute walk to Crown Heights.

The group stayed at Barclays for about an hour as latecomers joined the chants, which included the phrases “Zionism out of Brooklyn now” and “Resistance is justified.”

A man from Neturei Karta, an extremist anti-Zionist haredi Orthodox sect, held an Israeli flag that replaced the Star of David with a swastika. Messages on signs also included

“Zionism out of Brooklyn,” as well as “Zionists are: • Racists • Terrorists • Rapists/pedos • Colonizers • Nazis.”

Around 8 p.m., as the sun was setting, the group began the march to Crown Heights, walking east along Atlantic Avenue to the sound of drums and ongoing chants. Some passersby cheered or honked their horns. A girl opened her car window to wave an Israeli flag, and a few boys in Orthodox garb rode by on bicycles scanning the crowd.

Noticing a line of police blocking their way, the group made an unexpected right turn, cutting through a McDonald’s parking lot to reach the next block. But once on that street, they faced yet another line of police blocking the way with their bicycles.

The next hour or so became a tactical game of cat and mouse. Dozens of officers walked alongside the protesters’ route as street after street was blocked by lineups of officers on bicycles who continuously maneuvered to cut off the path to Crown Heights. Police vans and cars patrolled the streets as well.

In the end, NYPD funneled the protesters to Grand Army Plaza, not far from their starting point, and along Flatbush Avenue, cutting through Prospect Park and ending up in Flatbush, south of Crown Heights, where they chanted for a few more minutes before dispersing.

Protesters cursed at the police, who had shown up in full force and outnumbered the group of demonstrators. “Y’all on the wrong people tonight,” said the protest’s leader, named

Relly Rebel. Another man yelled, “They’re owned by the Zionist Jews!”



Pro-Palestinian supporters march near Barclays Center before being prevented from entering a Brooklyn neighborhood with a large Orthodox Jewish population, April 28, 2025. (Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

Erin, a 37-year-old protester who declined to share her last name for fear of being targeted, has lived in Crown Heights for about four years. She said she decided to protest after seeing the video of the crowd harassing the woman Thursday night.

“Now that I see that they are stalking and beating women who oppose a foreign government, I feel unsafe,” she said. “It’s pretty strange.”

The woman who was harassed told the Associated Press afterward that she was not involved in the protest.

Earlier on Monday, Rabbi Motti Seligson, a Chabad spokesman, had condemned “the crude language and violence of the small breakaway group of young people; such actions are entirely unacceptable and wholly antithetical to the Torah’s values.”

In that statement, he also condemned “violent provocateurs who called for the genocide of Jews in support of terrorists and terrorism — outside a synagogue, in a Jewish neighborhood, where some of the worst antisemitic violence in American history was

perpetrated.”



Protest leader Relly Rebel, center, yells at police after the protest is diverted around Crown Heights.
(Joseph Strauss)

That statement was a reference to the Crown Heights riots of 1991 that began after a car in Chabad leader Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson’s motorcade hit two Black children in the neighborhood, killing one; over days of violence that followed, rioters killed one Jewish man.

Rebel, the protest leader, also referenced the 1991 riots in a speech, repeating a disputed claim that “authorities” had “left the two Black kids on the ground. That’s why Black people went crazy.” (In fact, a local Hasidic emergency service [did not have the equipment needed to treat the children](#). A hospital ambulance took nine minutes to arrive.)

But in the end, comparisons to the Crown Heights riots were misplaced. At around 11:30 p.m., Seligson [tweeted](#) that Crown Heights had a “festive feel.” He thanked the NYPD.

“It was heartening to see scores of people, some Jewish and some not, who came to Crown Heights to protect the residents. These people weren’t looking for a fight,” he tweeted. “Clearly this was not 1991.”