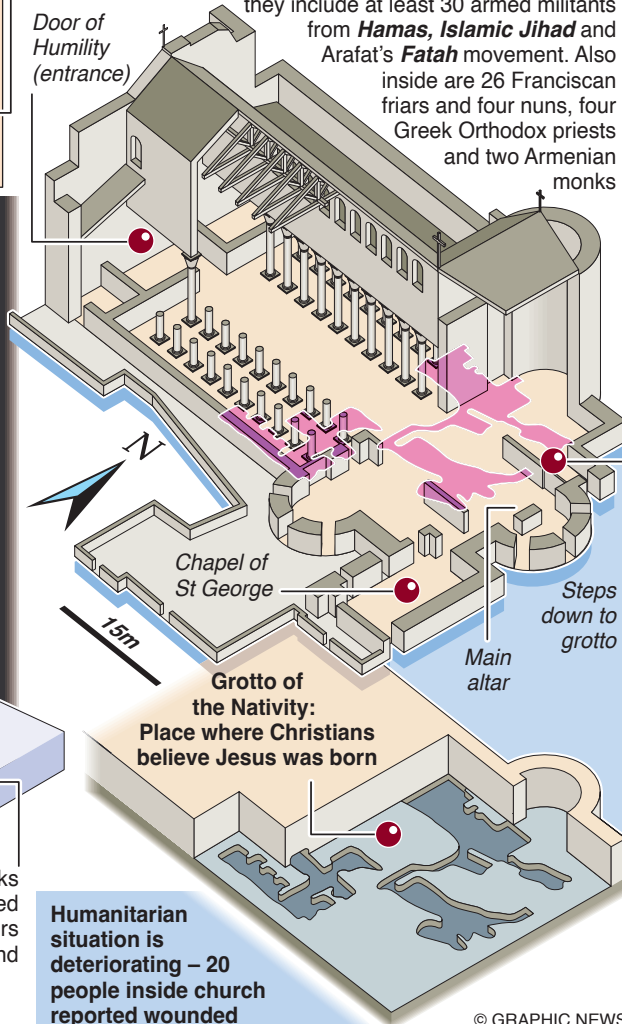




# Basilica of the Nativity

The oldest continuously used church in the world has survived the Crusades, looting by the Ottomans, an earthquake in 1834, a devastating fire in 1869, the Israeli invasion of the West Bank in 1967 and the first, seven-year, Palestinian intifada

Since April 2, over 200 Palestinians barricaded inside to avoid arrest after Israeli forces moved into Bethlehem. Israel says they include at least 30 armed militants from **Hamas**, **Islamic Jihad** and Arafat's **Fatah** movement. Also inside are 26 Franciscan friars and four nuns, four Greek Orthodox priests and two Armenian monks



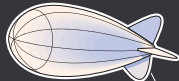
## Siege of Nativity compound

Army flares illuminate Church complex at night

Church of the Nativity

Stun grenades thrown into compound

Three surveillance balloons with cameras provide view of grounds below



Orthodox monastery

Armenian monastery

Manger Square

Basilica of St Catherine

Loudspeakers on cranes broadcast high-pitched noise to weaken morale

M60 tanks and armoured personnel carriers surround compound

Snipers on rooftops

Humanitarian situation is deteriorating – 20 people inside church reported wounded