

*‘The Palestinian leadership has incited publicly their people to “spill blood”’*

# ISSUES &

## THEN AND NOW IN JERUSALEM

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Over the centuries, Muslim leaders have generally recognized the rights of Jews to pray at their holiest sites

Once again anti-Jewish violence ignited in Jerusalem has spread beyond into Israel. This present spate of violence is part of the long-term campaign of Palestinians for change in the “status quo” on the Temple Mount. Their goal is to insure Jews visiting there feel sufficiently intimidated so that they no longer come and this will then mean a victory for the latest Palestinian intifada or the local jihad. It might be said of this recent upsurge in violence that “it has been forever thus,” but this would be incorrect as the history of Muslim rule over Jerusalem and Jewish presence in and around the Temple Mount is complex and checkered.

Before we recount this history, let us point out that the latest throwing of rocks, knife stabbings, and murders by Palestinians of Jews, especially in the vicinity of the Temple Mount, are not simply acts of “spontaneous rage” against Israeli “occupiers.” It is has been strategically organized and orchestrated in the hope that it will inspire copycat actions. One of the key organizations involved in perpetrating this violence is called the “Murabitoun.”

The Israeli General Security organization (the Shin Bet) explains these Temple Mount Palestinian activists receive about US \$1,000 a month for their “spontaneous” actions. The money comes from Hamas out of funds it receives from international Islamist donors. The young men and women activists spend time in the Al-Aqsa Mosque ostensibly studying the Quran and praying, while in fact they are on the lookout for Jewish presence on the Temple Mount. When Jews wearing skull caps or with any other item signifying their Jewishness appear, the Palestinian activists sound the alert. Groups of women activists in black veils wearing niqabs follow the visitors chanting threateningly “Allahu Akbar.”

Denial of Jewish rights on the Temple Mount is also being pushed by the Palestinian Authority with support of a number of Arab states at the UNESCO in Paris. They allege that the Western Wall where Jews have gathered for centuries past to pray are in danger of being destroyed by Israel. Apart from the absurdity of this allegation, it is made by those who failed miserably to prevent ISIL jihadists destroying ancient monuments in Iraq and Syria, or the Taliban’s destruction of the giant statues of Buddha in Bamiyan, Afghanistan.

The Palestinian leadership has incited publicly their people to “spill blood.” Mahmoud Abbas, the president of Palestinian Authority, declared on television, “We welcome every drop of blood spilled in Jerusalem. This is pure blood, clean blood, blood on its way to Allah.” Such chilling incitement to kill reaches back to the years immediately after the First World War, when the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin Al-Husseini, appointed by the British, made a career out of calling for jihad against the Jews culminating in his embrace of Hitler.

When Abbas calls to “spill blood,” or Jamal Zahalka, an Israeli Arab member of



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King Solomon dedicates the First Temple in Jerusalem.

the Knesset, declares, “I will personally expel every Jew who comes to the Temple Mount in a provocative manner,” they are following the odious footsteps of Haj Amin Al-Husseini. Their anti-Jew hatred not surprisingly is encouraged by King Abdullah II, the West’s favourite royal pretender whose family the British imported from Hejaz in Arabia and enthroned as unelected rulers over the largely Palestinian people and country of Jordan, illegally carved out of the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine in the early 1920s. Abdullah shamelessly announced recently that only Muslims should be allowed on the grounds of the Temple Mount.

There is, however, another history of Muslim rulers over Jerusalem. It is contrary to Al-Husseini’s jihad against the Jews that became embedded in the politics espoused by Palestinians over the past century. Though this history has been deliberately obscured by advocates of political Islam or Islamism in recent years, it is all the more necessary today to hold Palestinians accountable for shredding their own Muslim tradition that holds the promise of religious co-existence and mutual respect among Christians, Jews and Muslims.

When the first Arab armies conquered Palestine, or the land of Israel, in 637, Jews stood witness. Muslim and non-Muslim sources recount the surrender of Jerusalem by the Byzantine Patriarch Sophronious to Umar, the second of the righteous Caliph of Muslims and a close companion of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. There were Jews in the company

“When Ottoman Turks took control of the city in the 16th century, they banned Jews from the Temple Mount. However, they strictly enforced the right of Jews to pray at the Western Wall

of Umar when he visited the Temple Mount and ordered the removal of filth accumulated on the site.

Jews were granted permission by Umar to live in Jerusalem and pray on the Temple Mount. They were allowed to build a synagogue there. Even after the completion of the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque by the Umayyad caliphs based in Damascus, the 10th century Jewish writer Solomon ben Jeroham (a Karaite) recorded that Jews prayed on the Temple Mount.

Umar’s conduct on taking

control of Jerusalem from the Byzantines set the righteous precedent for Muslims to follow. When Muslim rulers behaved differently their conduct spoke ill of them, as happened with the Fatimid ruler Caliph Hakim in Cairo. Hakim turned malevolent against Christian and Jews, and destroyed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in 1009 (for which Jews were falsely blamed and victimized by a recurrent wave of anti-Semitism in Europe).

There were the Crusades, and Jews were massacred in Jerusalem by the Crusad-



AHMAH GHARABLI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

A Palestinian shouts at Jews visiting the Al-Aqsa mosque on Tuesday.

(17:11). Muhammad’s miraculously heavenly journey from King David’s city, referred in Arabic simply as al Quds (the Holiness), confirmed his lineage in the fraternity of prophets reaching back through Moses and Abraham to Adam.

Muhammad had prayed at first by turning his face in the direction (qiblah) of Jerusalem. After his flight to Medina from Mecca he received guidance, as the Quran states, to “turn towards the Holy Mosque” (2:144) in prayer. Since then Muslims have followed their prophet. From an Islamic point of view, it might be said, the revelation instructing the Prophet to pray in the direction of Mecca was a sign for him and his followers not to contest Jews with unlawful claims or deny their rights in Jerusalem.

Until 1967 no scholar in or outside of the Muslim world doubted that underneath the Temple Mount could be found the site and remains of the Jewish Temple of Solomon, Ezra and Nehemiah, and of Herod the Great within whose Temple Jesus of Nazareth prayed and preached. Even Haj Amin al-Husseini published in 1925 a brochure, titled “Brief Guide to Al-Haram Al-Sharif, Jerusalem” (the Arabic expression for the Temple Mount), in which is stated, “The site is one of the oldest in the world. Its sanctity dates from the earliest times. Its identity with the site of Solomon’s Temple is beyond dispute.”

It is now deliberately forgotten that when Jordan ruled the West Bank and East Jerusalem from 1948 until June 1967, the armistice agreement with Israel was violated and Jews were denied both entrance to the Temple Mount and praying at the Western Wall. Only after the IDF secured the whole Temple Mount in the six-day war of June 1967 did the Chief Rabbi of Israel blow the Shofar there, and conduct the first organized Jewish prayers since before the time of Ottoman rule.

The Temple Mount was, however, returned by Israeli authorities to the local Muslim administrators of the Waqf (religious endowment). This was an unprecedented act of religious goodwill by Jewish leaders when Israel could have installed her own administrators to safeguard with equanimity the rights of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Jerusalem. But instead of reciprocating goodwill, the Waqf administrators and Palestinians leaders have taken their cue from A-Husseini to perpetrate jihad against the Jews.

The solution to the contrived “problem” of Jews praying on the Temple Mount is simple. It is to recall Umar’s precedent, and insist Palestinians abide by it. United States President Barack Obama could remind Palestinians of this tradition, since he boasts of his knowledge of Islam and Muslim history. He could invite King Abdullah of Jordan to join him in Jerusalem with Prime Minister Netanyahu and demand an end to violence in al-Quds with freedom of worship on the Temple Mount. This would be an act of some audacity, and a fitting end to his presidency that began with the 2009 Nobel Prize for Peace awarded to him.

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