



Why the Status Quo on the Temple Mount Needs to Change by Prof. Hillel Frisch

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The fact that al-Aqsa is not in danger, does not mean that the status quo on the Temple Mount should remain constant. To the contrary, it must change on both strategic and moral grounds; and for the sake of true Israeli-Palestinian peace.

All of Israel's leaders, including Prime Minister Netanyahu and the opposition leaders, as well as senior officials and most of Israel's commentators and journalists, keep on reiterating that Israel has no intention of changing the "status quo" on the Temple Mount. They emphasize over and over again that the Palestinian campaign to wit "al-Aqsa is in danger" – is a modern blood libel.

It clearly is a modern blood libel.

When the Jordanian-Palestinian Jerusalem newspaper, *al-Quds* reappeared in 1968, it noted with satisfaction that in Ramadan of that year 600 Muslims came to pray at al-Aqsa. In July 2015 during Ramadan, 47 years after al-Aqsa purported has been in danger under Israeli rule, it reported (along with Hamas media outlets) that 300,000 Muslims did so.

"Al-Aqsa is in danger" has just about the same validity as the assertion that Israel is involved in ethnic cleansing in the territories. The Arab populations of Judea and Samaria/the West Bank and Gaza have grown at least four-fold since 1967 and so has the standard of living – which explains in large part why the number of Muslims praying in al-Aqsa has grown exponentially.

However, that al-Aqsa is not in danger does not mean that the status quo on the Temple Mount should remain. To the contrary, it must change on both strategic and moral grounds.

Strategically, the status quo must change because the demand that Jews (and Christians as well) be given the right to pray on the Temple Mount is interlocked with Israel's justifiable demand that the Palestinians accept Israel as nation state of the Jewish People.

Most Palestinians oppose both Jewish prayer on Har HaBayit (the Temple Mount) and recognition of Israel as a Jewish state for the same ideological and theocratic reason. In their view, Jews can be no more than *ahl al-dhimmi*, a protected but subordinate religious minority under the protection of Muslims, and not a sovereign people equal to the Muslim Palestinian state and its nationals.

Only if the Palestinians accept the right of parity and religious freedom on the Mount in Jerusalem, and recognize Israel as nation state of the Jewish People will the War of Independence that Israel fought in 1948 be truly over.

Jamal Zahalkah MK, who is ideologically linked to the Marxist ideology of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, is for this reason so insistent on defending the exclusivity of the Muslim hold on the Temple Mount. He is convinced that if Israel ever exercises effective sovereignty on the Temple Mount, this might mean that Israel is here to stay.

There is another reason why the status quo on the Temple Mount should change. It starts with the realization that Israel is facing a situation of protracted conflict with the Palestinians; a conflict that will have to be managed for the long term. In this situation, it is critically important that the Palestinians realize that Israel's managing of the does *not* necessarily mean keeping the status quo! After all, if the Palestinians have nothing to lose from a protracted conflict, why should they moderate?

In short, they will never be peace if a Jewish presence on the Temple Mount is seen as a provocation or desecration of the holy place.

Then there is the moral argument. As a modern democratic state, Israel must ensure equality and parity to all religious communities who deem Jerusalem sacred. By opposing Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount, Palestinian Authority

politicians and Israel's Arab MKs show their true colors as leaders driven more by theocratic conviction and anti-Jewish prejudice than anything resembling democratic and liberal convictions.

This is of course nothing new. Many Arab MKs and Palestinian leaders exhibited sycophantic behavior towards Arab state tyrants before the Arab Spring. Even the most liberal of Jewish Israelis wondered how former Azmi Bishara MK, a professor of philosophy who described himself as a liberal, defied Israeli law to attend and eulogize Hafez al-Assad, one of the worse tyrants of his day. Bishara then went on to spy for Hizballah, the Iranian-created and backed terror movement hardly known for its liberalism, and fled from Israel.

The demand that the Palestinians (and even more so, Israel's Arab citizens) accept Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people is in keeping with the description of the Jewishness of the Jewish democratic state. The demand that the Palestinians accept parity on the Temple Mount is a test of accepting the state's democratic nature.

Ultimately, these demands are for the Palestinians' own good. The Palestinian national movement will continue to fail if it remains wedded to its theocratic, anti-democratic frame of mind. The current, radical ideological Arab predispositions go a long way in explaining the decline of the Arab and Muslim world as well as Arab and Muslim state failure and internecine violence; and they spell special disaster for the Palestinians.

Alas, 87 years after the Palestinian Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husayni, coined the false accusation that "al-Aqsa is in danger," young Palestinians driven by blind theocratic hatred still run amok in the streets of Jerusalem to kill Jews. Their behavior is a reflection of the collective disaster of the Palestinian political movement, and the tragedy of radical Palestinian nationalism that Israel is saddled with.

Prof. Hillel Frisch, a senior research associate at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, is a professor of political science and Middle East studies at Bar-Ilan University.

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