



PERSPECTIVES

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What Status Quo on the Temple Mount?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The so-called “status quo” on the Temple Mount is dead. It was killed by Palestinian denial of Jewish connection not only to the Mount but to any part of the Land of Israel, by terrorists who may have been aided and abetted by the Waqf, and by Abbas’s diplomatic assaults on Jewish history and legitimacy in Jerusalem. It is time to level the playing field. In the context of renewed peace talks with the Palestinians, Israel should put on the table a plan to bring equity and fairness to administration of the Temple Mount: a plan that would represent a true sharing of sovereignty over the place most holy to the Jewish People.

Arab editorial cartoons depict Israeli troops destroying the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount.

The so-called “status quo” on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem has been violated repeatedly in recent years by radical Palestinian and Islamic actors, turning the Mount into a base of hostile operations against Israel instead of protecting it as zone of prayer and peace.

Waqf and Islamic movement provocateurs have attacked Jewish visitors to the Mount and Jewish worshipers at the Western Wall below the Mount. They have greatly restricted visitation rights to the Mount for non-Muslims; hijacked the pulpits in the mosque on the Mount to preach hatred and violence against Israel; purveyed a canard about the Al-Aqsa mosque being under attack from Israel in order to rile up the Palestinian public and broader Islamic world; and conducted vast and illegal construction projects on the Mount and beneath it, willfully destroying centuries of Jewish archaeological treasures.

And last week, Palestinian terrorists smuggled machine guns onto the Temple Mount and attacked police guarding its gates, killing two Israeli officers. The

terrorists launched their attack from within the Temple Mount and then fled into the shrines on the Mount.

While Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas has condemned the terrorist attack, he continues to roil the waters and foment violence against Israel by repeating the canard that “Al Aqsa is in danger.” Now, Abbas is choreographing resistance to the security measures put in place by Israel. His Fatah political party has called for “rage” in the streets of Jerusalem. Abbas must therefore assume responsibility for the clashes that have taken place in recent days between police and overheated Palestinian protesters.

In fact, Abbas has stoked a broad-scale campaign against the authenticity of Israel’s historic rights in Jerusalem. In September 2015 he said, “Al-Aksa is ours and so is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. They (the Jews) have no right to desecrate them with their filthy feet. We won’t allow them to do so and we will do whatever we can to defend Jerusalem.”

Abbas then fulminated about (false) Jewish threats to the mosques on the Mount, and praised the *mourabitoun* (Islamic gangs posted on the Mount to accost non-Muslim visitors). “Each drop of blood that was spilled in Jerusalem is pure blood as long as it is for the sake of Allah. Every *shahid* (martyr) will be in heaven and every wounded person will be rewarded, by Allah’s will.”

Abbas’s Religious Affairs Minister Mahmoud Al-Habbash and Mufti Muhammad Hussein have picked up the thread and constantly propagate lies about Israeli “plans” to undermine and destroy the Muslim shrines on the Mount.

The former Chief Justice of the PA’s Religious Court, Sheikh Tayseer Al-Tamimi, has declared that the PA’s Islamic belief and political position is that Jews should not only be prohibited from praying on the Temple Mount but at the Western Wall of the Temple Mount too, since the Wall is part of the “blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque” and not part of any “alleged” ancient Jewish temple.

Such scurrilous, inflammatory talk fuels and legitimizes Arab violence. Abbas’s Palestinian Authority has become an extremist, not a moderate, actor in this regard.

It should be noted that Abbas has revved up tensions around the Temple Mount in each of the last five Septembers, in advance of his appearances at the UN General Assembly: a cynical and desperate ploy aimed at gaining global attention. His ambassadors have repeatedly brought resolutions to international fora such as UNESCO that deny Jewish history and rights in Jerusalem and Hebron.

Simultaneously, Abbas has presided over a massive increase in spending on salaries to terrorist prisoners and payments to families of terrorist “martyrs.” According to Palestinian Media Watch, these payments have risen by 13% and 4%, respectively, in 2017, amounting to 1.2 billion shekels (\$355 million) this year alone.

In short, Abbas continues to play a dangerous double game, whereby he poses both as a defender of Islam by attacking Jewish history and fueling terrorism while also purporting to be (and occasionally serving as) as Israel’s security partner.

But responsibility for the deteriorating situation in and around the Temple Mount must also be assigned to Israeli leadership.

Repeatedly, Jerusalem prefers to merely “quiet things down” and “restore calm.” It chooses to maintain a situation whereby Muslims exercise exclusive religious and national rights on the Mount and have rigged the site as a base of attack, while Jews have only limited (and increasingly impossible) visitation rights on Har HaBayit (the Temple Mount) and are altogether forbidden from praying there.

This is no longer acceptable. Israel cannot redress the situation by attempting to “contain” things. Beefing up security by plunking metal detectors at the gates of the Mount won’t do the trick. Israel should not swallow the Islamic violence that has become the new status quo. Most of all, Israel cannot accept the slanders at the heart of the Palestinian-Islamic narrative regarding the Mount and the Jewish presence in Zion.

It is time to recognize that the “status quo” on Har HaBayit is dead. It was killed by the *mourabitoun*; by the calumnies of Palestinian Authority-appointed Waqf imams, whose sermons on the Mount daily deny Jewish connection not only to the Temple Mount but to any part of the Land of Israel; by terrorists who may have been aided and abetted by the Waqf; and by Abbas’s diplomatic assaults on Jewish history and legitimacy in Jerusalem.

It is time to level the playing field. In the context of renewed peace talks with the Palestinians, Israel should put on the table a plan to bring equity and fairness to administration of the Temple Mount: a plan that would represent a true sharing of sovereignty over the place most holy to the Jewish People.

This will require Palestinian recognition of the Jewish People’s ancient ties to the holy site and the holy land, and the facilitation of Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount.

This can be effected either through a time-sharing prayer arrangement similar to that in place at the Cave of Machpela in Hebron, or through a synagogue tucked away on the fringes of the vast plaza that won't overshadow the two large Moslem structures on the Mount.

It will also entail the end of unilateral and destructive Waqf excavation/construction on the Temple Mount. And of course, it entails rigorous de-militarizing of the Temple Mount via air-tight Israeli security control.

These positions are no more "radical" or "explosive" than Palestinian demands for a massive release of terrorists from Israeli jails or for withdrawal to stale armistice borders of 70 years ago. They are legitimate, levelheaded, and judicious Israeli positions. They constitute a reasonable and moderate Israeli negotiating stance, and should become part of Israel's diplomatic oeuvre.

The new position proposed by Israel will engender Palestinian (and some Western) resistance, but with both resoluteness and sensitivity (including coordination with Jordan), Israel can overcome the opposition.

Jerusalem is a consensus issue in Israeli politics. The Netanyahu government would enjoy widespread public backing for action to parry Palestinian and Islamic incitement in Jerusalem and to solidify Israel's rights on Har HaBayit. Only a forward-looking and affirmative Israeli stance can create a new situation of just compromise on the Temple Mount.

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