



## Recurring Patterns: The Temple Mount Riots

by Manfred Gerstenfeld

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Major Palestinian riots erupted in response to the placement of metal detectors at the entrance of the Temple Mount, with the Palestinian inciters falsely claiming that the al-Aqsa Mosque is in danger. This form of action might serve as a model for future riots even if Israel signs a peace agreement with the Palestinians. As Israel's concessions in such an agreement would be irreversible, the threat of easy-to-incite riots makes the prospects for peace even more remote.

On July 14, two Israeli police officers were murdered in Jerusalem. They were members of the Druze community, a religious and ethnic minority. The three Muslim murderers came from the town of Umm al-Fahm in the north of Israel.

They had hidden their weapons on the Temple Mount, where the al-Aqsa Mosque, which is managed by the Waqf, a Muslim religious trust, stands. The three terrorists were killed by Israeli police.

The day before the killings, one of the perpetrators published a selfie in which he stands before al-Aqsa. The photo is accompanied by the text, "Tomorrow's smile will be more beautiful, God willing."

Israel reacted to the murders by increasing security measures through the installation of metal detectors. The alternative would have been to wait passively until the next contingent of terrorists arrived, ready to employ the proven formula of bringing in weapons and hiding them at that place of worship.

The installation of metal detectors led Palestinian preachers to call upon the worshipers to pray publicly outside the mosque on the morning of Friday, July 21. Riots followed during which three Palestinians were killed and a number

wounded. On the same day, a Palestinian terrorist murdered a Jewish father, seriously injured his wife, and killed their two adult children in the village of Halamish during their Shabbat meal.

It is estimated that this terrorist's family will receive more than \$3000 per month from the Palestinian Authority for many years to come. These payments are co-financed by Western countries.

In the meantime, the metal detectors have been removed. Due to the riots, Israel has opted instead to install more expensive and technologically advanced tools to detect weapons from entering the holy site in the future. Despite the removal of the detectors, Palestinian riots in Jerusalem have continued.

When we examine the reactions of the actors in this saga, it becomes possible to discern recurring patterns.

In the past, the PLO-dominated Palestinian Authority was able to control riots. A typical case in point was the "al-Aqsa Intifada," which began in late September 2000. Though presented as a spontaneous response to Ariel Sharon's Temple Mount visit, several PLO/PA officials (including Marwan Barghouti and Minister of Communications Imad Faloudji) were to admit that the violence had been planned well in advance by Yasser Arafat. All that was required was a handy pretext to start it.

Since then, the stature in the western world of the Palestinian Authority and Mahmoud Abbas has steadily increased. In 2016, many members of the European Parliament gave Abbas a standing ovation after a speech in which he made the vile anti-Semitic accusation that an Israeli rabbi had urged Israelis to poison the water of the Palestinians. Two days later, Abbas had to admit that his libel was a complete falsehood.

In contrast to his glowing image among Europeans, Abbas is seen by most Palestinians as very weak. His Fatah movement supports the riots, partly because it fears losing even more influence if it does not. He is playing a dangerous game, however. If the riots continue, Abbas may lose control over them. If it is true that he has canceled the PA's security collaboration with Israel, he might find himself in immediate danger. If he is without the protection of the Israeli security services, it will be much easier for Hamas sympathizers to target him.

Another recurrent pattern is the abuse of holy or protected places. During Israel's military campaigns against Hamas, the terrorist group often hid weapons in mosques, universities, and schools. This included schools of the UN agency UNRWA. During the December 2008-January 2009 exchange,

several Hamas leaders hid in a Gaza hospital because they knew Israel would not target it. Hamas also uses civilians as human shields.

Yet another recurrent pattern is the behavior of foreign governments and leaders. Many excuse and condone Palestinian terror, incitement, and violence. Others feel the need to step in with condemnations or recommendations. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, for example, is a staunch supporter of Hamas, using any available opportunity to condemn Israel. This time, he said: “By occupying the al-Aqsa Mosque, Israel has exceeded the boundaries.” France issued an anodyne statement mainly to create the illusion that it is still an important international player while it struggles with critical domestic issues.

Still another recurrent pattern is the behavior of foreign media, which habitually turns aggressors into victims and vice versa. The media watch organization Honest Reporting Canada created a detailed list of many such distortions in the Canadian media alone during the first days of the riots.

In view of these recurrent patterns, a peace agreement is likely to be useless. The Palestinians may one day sign such an agreement, and indeed maintain quiet for a while – but they will ultimately resort once again to riots, violence, and murder, as they invariably have in the past.

The Temple Mount riots created a perfect model for such a pattern. Commit a crime against Israel related to al-Aqsa. If Israel reacts with enhanced security measures, incite rioting by declaring the mosque to be in danger.

Israel cannot undo the concessions it makes for “peace.” Those concessions are likely to include the removal of isolated West Bank settlements and an exchange of land in return for the larger settlement blocs. The Temple Mount riots provide tangible evidence that as matters stand now, a peace agreement is not a credible option.

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