



PERSPECTIVES

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Beware Media Fear-Mongering

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The developments that followed the Temple Mount crisis highlighted the media's penchant for manufacturing unnecessary drama. If anything, the decision to roll back security measures on the Temple Mount was a sign of Israel's strength, not its weakness.

A very long time ago, I was assigned responsibility for intelligence on a major regional nation. One day, a serious incident took place in that country. During the following intelligent assessment, I said that state would never be the same as it was before the incident.

Nearly 40 years have passed since then and that country remains the same. There is currently talk of change, but it is led by the same regime, so it is unclear whether changes will materialize.

Later, I witnessed other major events that seemed as if they were going to change the world, but the world remained unfazed. I also recall an Israeli leader who had risen to greatness and thought that because he had stepped onto the stage at an important time in history, the environment around him would change. He, too, was wrong.

These events taught me an important lesson. I learned that later, after the initial shock of the event has worn off, when hindsight has allowed for some analysis and enough time has passed to place the event in the bigger picture, one can make better sense of it. In many cases, the distance of time reveals that the incident, traumatic as it may have been, did not change reality. Life simply went on.

This dissonance between what is experienced as a colossal event in real time and its actual impact on reality seems even more extreme today, mainly

because of the nature of today's media. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, favor the immediate version of events, which is published without scrutiny or proper interpretation and preferably in the shortest way possible. Moreover, it seems that digging deeper is now frowned upon. Sometimes the medium itself limits an allowed description to a specific number of characters, so there is no technical way to explain things further. On television, nothing is more precious than air time, and every second is accounted for carefully, leaving no time for a true discussion.

This lends even greater importance to later, in-depth discussions that study the issues at the heart of public debate. This is one of the most important functions of the press, perhaps even more important than exposés and scoops, as those can be found in abundance on social media as well. But what social media lack is depth of analysis, though it is essential for anyone who wants to better understand the world we live in and is not satisfied with an immediate, superficial explanation of things.

Get to the root of the issue

It seems correct to apply this principle to the recent Temple Mount crisis and the visit by King Abdullah of Jordan to Ramallah.

It would appear that the events on the Temple Mount could have redefined and perhaps even revolutionized relations between Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Jordan. For many, the Israeli zigzag with respect to the placement and later removal of advanced security measures at the holy site appeared to be a misstep that could greatly undermine Israel's international image and perhaps even its global status.

But fast-forward a few weeks, and nothing describes reality more than the phrase "life goes on."

Israel's decision-makers considered the Temple Mount an isolated site that could be dealt with on its own merit. From a narrow, local perspective, there was solid logic behind the decision to place metal detectors at the gates leading to the Temple Mount following the July 14 murder of two policemen at the site. However, the Temple Mount is bigger than that, as it is very significant not only to Israelis as a whole, but also to the Palestinians and to Jordan. Jordan controls the Waqf, the Islamic trust that acts as custodian of the site, as per an agreement between Jerusalem and the Hashemite kingdom, which is home to many Palestinians.

Sure enough, the fast and furious Arab response that followed the decision to bolster security measures on the Temple Mount made Israel reconsider and

eventually shelve the placing of metal detectors at the volatile site. Many argued that Israel's global status suffered a severe blow over the rollback, but in retrospect, it seems Israel lost nothing. On the contrary: the decision indicated maturity and self-confidence on the part of the Jewish state.

Once it became clear that this was neither the time nor the place to prove Israel's might, there was no point in insisting on it. Israel is strong enough to deny Jordan's requests for certain arrangements on the Temple Mount, but will its interests be better served by doing so and thereby prompting Palestinian riots that destabilize the Jordanian king's regime?

The logical answer is "no," which is why Israel did well to grant the Jordanian request and ease pressure on its ally in the war on terror. The real test is not placing metal detectors on the Temple Mount and plunging the area into chaos, but rather in devising a rational and thorough plan to counter the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement, which is really just the local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

For too many years, the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement, outlawed in 2015, has been allowed to do whatever it wants on the Temple Mount, and the time has come to stop it. No one in Jordan or the Palestinian Authority would shed a tear if Israel curbs the movement and undermines its appeal.

This brings us to Abdullah's visit to Ramallah. Many have decried the so-called "isolation" imposed on Israel in the wake of the Temple Mount crisis, especially since the Jordanian king met with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and not with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

But when actually reading the statements the Jordanians and Palestinians released after the meeting, which was shorter than planned, one realizes the two parties experienced two different visits. The Palestinian statements made it seem as if the situation on the Temple Mount was the core issue discussed, while the Jordanian statements placed an emphasis on the need to resume peace talks under the auspices of the US.

The fact of the matter is that the visit was another sign of Abbas's weakness. It soon became clear that it was talks between Israel and Jordan that led to the establishment of a new reality on the Temple Mount. Each side contributed its part. The Jordanians got "lucky," so to speak, with the embassy shooting in Amman, which allowed them to present a real concession, while Abbas had no part in the course of events. This allowed Abdullah to present Abbas with a demand to resume peace talks with Israel.

In hindsight, it can be said that the events of the Temple Mount, serious as they were, had little effect on Israel's relations with the Jordanians or the Palestinians. The Palestinian Authority remains as weak as ever, and Israel demonstrated maturity and responsibility and managed to maintain its strategic relations with Jordan.

Here, too, the deadlines and moment-after commentary failed to capture the real significance of the events. It was again made clear that such incidents, serious and sensitive as they may be, cannot change the reality set by the true balance of power among the parties involved. Even if it seems the balance has been undermined, this shift is usually temporary.

It is therefore advisable to keep things in proportion and keep a cool head as events unfold. Today's headlines will likely be forgotten by tomorrow.

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