



PERSPECTIVES

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Hamas is Undermining Israel's Sovereignty in Jerusalem

by Prof. Hillel Frisch

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Hamas has expanded the scope of its "extortion racket" from Gaza to include Israeli policy in Jerusalem. This dangerous trend is sadly abetted by Israeli officialdom and much of the media.

Once upon a time (though not that long ago), Hamas was content to make do with threatening Israel over its military incursions into Gaza.

Not anymore.

In the face of chronic Israeli weakness, it has increasingly linked the exercise of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem to its threatened "retaliation." Hamas head Ismail Haniyya, former head Khaled Mash'al, and the organization's military commander Muhammad Deif have all threatened bedlam should Israel carry out a court-mandated eviction of Arab families in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah or allow the Jerusalem Day parade march in the Old City. Israeli Arab MKs Ahmad Tibi and Esawi Freij have followed suit.

Hamas's "extortion racket" now extends to Jerusalem affairs just as Arab Bedouin "protection rackets" in Israel spread many years ago to other parts of the country.

This dangerous development is hardly surprising. Enemies tend to exploit their foes' weaknesses and divisions and Hamas (and Fatah) are not exceptions to this rule. After years of deliberately harmless air strikes against terror targets in Gaza in response to the firing of rockets and the launching of incendiary balloons on Israeli population centers, these terror groups could hardly act otherwise.

What is particularly unsettling, if not downright dangerous, is the way Israeli officialdom and most of the media abet the expansion of this extortion racket to the exercise of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem.

In a news item carried by the *Jerusalem Post*, we are told that "Israel Police's Jerusalem District Chief Doron Turgeman begged for the flags parade route, which usually goes through the Old City of Jerusalem, to be rerouted amid the recent rising tensions." What better evidence could there be that Hamas's threats are working when the police chief in charge of enforcing Israel's rule of law in Jerusalem admits to being cowered?

If there was any doubt that Hamas was winning, it was dispelled three days later by Israel Police Spokesperson Commander Eli Levi who told Army Radio that "if the police were to identify a rise in the likelihood of innocent bystanders getting hurt as a result of Jews going up to the Temple Mount, we will, of course, reevaluate our plans."

Listening to Turgeman and Levi, Hamas (and Fatah) goons know full well what to do to wreck Jerusalem Day celebrations: to hurt "innocent bystanders" by pouncing, for example, on Jews going for their daily prayers in the Wailing Wall. One arm of the police tries to quell violence while the other foments it.

Hamas can also count on the legal establishment's support for its extortionist racket. According to Israel's public radio, Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit will personally ask the court to postpone its next session on the eviction of Arab tenants from Jewish-owned land in Sheikh Jarrah, scheduled for Jerusalem Day, due to the current tensions in the city. Such intervention is highly unusual in a civil case to which the government is not party, and Mandelblit must realize that his deviation from the correct legal procedure not only indicates the politicization of Israel's legal branch but also offers Hamas (and Fatah) a clear victory.

Nor by now, is it surprising that former senior members of Israel's security establishment, who probably reflect much of the IDF's current thinking, are among the foremost proponents of surrender to Palestinian extortion and rule of the mob. David Tzur, a former Counterterrorism Unit Commander, urged "the changing the parade route from its current plan," while Maj.-Gen. (res.) Amos Gilad suggested to "reevaluate the Flags Parade—I would remove anything [from the schedule] that could lead to any sort of friction," warning that it "could ignite a powder keg" —a trite metaphor that is frequently evoked but rarely materializes.

Most of the Israeli media is only too glad to ensure that this pronounced readiness to cower to violence—something that the Zionist movement, especially Labor, has long derided as classic *galut* behavior, but which is increasingly reflected by Israeli officialdom and the institutions it controls—comes across loud and clear both to the Israeli public and its mortal enemies, Hamas and Fatah. (One can safely assume that there are voices urging the enforcement of Israeli sovereignty even at a cost, but they are hardly aired in most of the media.)

Nor should the government be absolved of responsibility for this dangerous trend. To be sure, bureaucracies generally tend to ensure current tranquility while ignoring the adverse long-term implications of this appeasement; and this includes the IDF leadership, whose willingness to fight can no longer be taken for granted. Yet this can hardly exonerate the political leadership from shedding its longstanding appeasement policy and state clearly and loudly that just as Israel has preserved the right of prayer and congregation of Jerusalem's Muslim residents, so it must ensure the right of other residents to engage in their rituals on Jerusalem Day.

And, of course, the government must muster the will, and force if necessary, to act upon this assertion. For the enforcement of Israel's sovereignty in Jerusalem is a public good that is certainly acknowledged by the city's Jewish population, and probably (judging by the true scope of Arab violence) by the silent majority of its Arab residents as well.

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