

Palestinians in East Jerusalem: Road Map to Annexation

SABRIEN AMROV

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- **What are the sources of recent unrest in East Jerusalem?**
 - **What does Israel want to achieve?**
 - **How is this received by Palestinians?**
 - **What is a proper course of action by the international community?**
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Tensions were mounting in East Jerusalem between Palestinian residents, Israeli settlers and Israeli security forces long before October. Since January 2014, the Israeli Ministry of Housing has demolished over 300 houses and recently confiscated over 29 apartments handed over to right-wing Israeli settlers after forcing Palestinians families out of their homes in neighborhoods such as Silwan.¹ Meanwhile, at the al-Haram al-Sharif (The Noble Sanctuary) specifically, Israeli forces raided the al-Aqsa mosque almost every month since the start of 2014, blocked worshippers from visiting both the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque on several occasions, including during the holy month of Ramadan. This was done either as a collective punishment or to close off the premise so that right-wing settler groups and Israeli parliamentarians could tour the 35-acre compound.² In addition, without international scrutiny, Israel engaged in nu-

merous excavations, digging up twenty tunnels around the mosque, allowing it to expand the Western Wall.³

The strife climaxed, however, with the announcement of Israel's plan to expand two existing illegal settlements: Har Homa and Ramat Shlomo. Tel Aviv disclosed it will add more than an extra 1,000 housing units for the twin settlements situated in and around East Jerusalem, the part of the city the Palestinians demand for their future state.⁴ The news sparked international ire, as it followed a previous announcement made in early October of Israeli plans to build another 2,610 settler homes at Givat Hamatos, one of the last open hilltops separating Jerusalem from Bethlehem.⁵ On October 29, the United Nations

1. Saed Bannoura. Tuesday, September 30, 2014. "Settlers take Over 23 Palestinian Apartments in Silwan" IMEMC News.

2. For a detailed time line of confrontations at al-Aqsa Mosque in 2014, visit "Timeline: Al-Aqsa mosque" @ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/timeline-al-aqsa-mosque-2014413111757867796.html>.

3. United Nations News Service, "UNESCO: Israel must stop work near Al-Aqsa Mosque pending agreed plan." Electronic Intifada @ <http://electronicintifada.net/content/unesco-israel-must-stop-work-near-al-aqsa-mosque-pending-agreed-plan/3168>.

4. Jeffrey Heller, Monday, October 27, 2014. "Netanyahu to expedite plans for 1,000 new settler homes". Reuters @ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/27/us-mideast-settlement-idUSKBN0IG23420141027>.

5. Times of Israel staff, October 1, 2014, "Israel okays 2,610 homes for Jews and Arabs in E. Jerusalem", The Times of Israel <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-okays-2610-homes-for-jews-and-arabs-in-e-jerusalem/#ixzz3LaR2KHiD>.

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Security Council called on an emergency session, at the request of Palestinian and Jordanian diplomats, to tackle the news of Israeli intransigent continuation of illegal settlement construction in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.⁶

On Friday, October 30th, for the first time since 1967, Al-Aqsa mosque was closed off to all Palestinians. Israel deployed some 13,000 police across East Jerusalem. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas called the closure an “act of war” and critics said the move could have sparked a new uprising as it is considered one of Islam’s holiest sites.⁷ Hamas Political Leader Khaled Meshaal called on the international community, specifically Muslims, to defend the Holy Site.⁸ On November 5th, Jordan, which holds custodianship over the Al-Aqsa mosque since 1994, recalled its ambassador after Islamic authorities of the sites informed King Abdullah that Israeli security forces had entered the mosque with their boots, vandalizing the premises, accompanied by Israeli settlers.⁹ The security threat posed on worshippers of the al-Aqsa mosque was reminiscent of the attack that the Roman Orthodox Church received this past summer by right-wing settlers who wrote in graffiti “Death to Arabs.”¹⁰ Despite receiving outcry from American and European counterparts for both the settlement announcement and the Israeli raid of al-Aqsa mosque, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that Israeli settlers had a right to live in East Jerusalem.¹¹

6. Associated Press. October 29, 2014. “UN Security Council holds emergency session to discuss Israeli housing construction in E. Jerusalem”, Haaretz, @ <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.623484>.

7. Tova Dvorin, Thursday, October 30, 2014. “Abbas Says Closing Temple Mount ‘A Declaration of War’”. National News. @

8. Staff. Thursday, October 16, 2014. “Hamas leader urges Muslims to defend Jerusalem shrine from ‘Israeli seizure’”. Reuters. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/16/us-mideast-palestinians-hamas-idUSKCN01524S20141016>.

9. Staff. Wednesday, October 15, 2014. “Israeli vandalism at al-Aqsa culminates in kidnaps, injuries”. Pal Info. @ <http://english.palinfo.com/site/pages/details.aspx?itemid=45642>.

10. Nir Hasson, Monday, May 12, 2014. “Jerusalem church defaced in latest hate crime attack”. Hareetz. @ <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/1.589744>.

11. Barak David. Thursday, October 2, 2014. “Netanyahu rejects U.S. criticism of East Jerusalem settlements”. Hareetz. @ <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.618752>.

Yet, settlement expansion coupled with daily intimidation and confiscation of Palestinian public and personal space in East Jerusalem by Israel is not an element of novelty. It is a constitutive part of the systematic policy of dispossession of Palestinians from East Jerusalem undertaken by Israel since the 1967 war.

“CREEPING ANNEXATION”

Indeed, the judaisation of East Jerusalem has long been a strategy for Israeli annexation of Jerusalem. Judaisation entails the demographic and physical altering of Jerusalem by Israel to transform the space into an exclusively Jewish-Israeli one, stamping out the identity of Palestinians from the city and ensuring the consolidation of Israeli administration and control over all of Jerusalem.¹² Under international law, East Jerusalem is considered as an occupied territory, and is regarded as such by the international community, including the United Nations and the United States. In other words, building Israeli infrastructure in East Jerusalem or in the West Bank violates Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention which stipulates that “The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.”¹³ Despite this legal clarity, since 1967, the Knesset, irrespective of the government in power, has pushed to transform Occupied East Jerusalem into a Jewish-Israeli city. In fact, on June 10, 1967, Israel unilaterally declared Jerusalem unified after illegally extending its jurisdiction to the eastern part of the city.¹⁴

These attempts at structural violence have included 1) settlement expansions and influx of Jewish settlers, 2) separating the Palestinians of East Jerusalem from the rest of the OPT, 3) establishment of draconian laws forbidden Palestinians from freedom of movement, job security and social services, 4) freezing land

12. For more on Judaisation, please read “Disappearing Palestine: Israel’s Experiments in Human Despair” by Jonathan Cook, Zed Books, October 2008.

13. Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949. @ <https://www.icrc.org/ihl/WebART/380-600056>.

14. Charles D. Smith. Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents. (2007) p.54.

registration causing house evictions and demolitions and 5) building private roads to serve exclusively to settlers. Concrete example of such demographic and spatial control include the confiscation of land “in the public interest”, using a British law of 1943 and building 15 illegal settlements, covering an area of 24 sq. km, or the equivalent of 35% of the area of East Jerusalem’s total of 72sq km. The use of the Planning and Building Law, which has been applied to Jerusalem since 1976, effectively turning around 40% of East Jerusalem a designated “green” zone to prevent Palestinian Arabs from using the land to build. In fact, in 1973 the Israeli Ministerial Committee for Jerusalem Affairs, led by the then Prime Minister Golda Meir, made a decision to keep the Arab proportion of the total population living within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem (East and West) at 22%.¹⁵

The recent ransacking of Al-Aqsa mosque by right-wing settlers and Israeli security forces has also resurfaced the constant abuse and humiliation of Palestinian cultural heritage and religious sites in Jerusalem. With this historical context in mind, these recent developments can be observed as , according to Israeli anthropologist and activist Jeff Halper explains, “the final phase of the judaisation.”¹⁶

ISRAELI CLAIMS TO EAST JERUSALEM AND TEMPLE MOUNT

Declaring ownership on the Holy sites is one of the many ways with which Israel extends its presence in occupied East Jerusalem. While some media outlets such as the New York Times have suggested the right-wing Israeli activists are advocating for only greater access to Temple Mount (Haram al-Sharif), their de-

mands are actually of a much graver nature.¹⁷ These groups, led by activists such as Yehuda Glick (who also survived an assassination attempt by a Palestinian), believe that they have the right to remove the Muslim holy site and replace them with a Jewish temple. In fact, the aims of these groups, such as Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful Movement, are quite explicit. On their website, they clearly state; “Liberating the Temple Mount from Arab (Islamic) occupation. The Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa mosque were placed on this Jewish or biblical holy site as a specific sign of Islamic conquest and domination. The Temple Mount can never be consecrated to the Name of G-d without removing these pagan shrines. It has been suggested that they be removed, transferred to, and rebuilt at Mecca.”¹⁸

This group has acted on its ambitions, without any restraint from the Israeli security forces. For example, on March 12, 2014, Glick, the director of the far-right Temple Institute, entered al-Haram al-Sharif compound with two ultra-Orthodox Jewish rabbis, under the armed escort of Israeli police.¹⁹ In parallel, members of the Knesset from right-wing parties such as Moshe Feiglin, Tzippy Hotovely and Ayelet Shaked have also visited the site, generating clashes between Muslim worshippers and Israeli forces. Prime Minister Netanyahu, on the other hand, has publicly distanced his cabinet from these visits to Temple Mount, claiming that he is not interested in changing the Status Quo in the Old city.²⁰ That being said, when it comes to the rest of East Jerusalem, Netanyahu continues to push for the housing crisis of Palestinians, managing

15. Emiler Shaffey (December 2011). No Home, No Homeland. The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. @[http://www.icahd.org/sites/default/files/No%20Home%20No%20Homeland%20V2.0%20\(3\).pdf](http://www.icahd.org/sites/default/files/No%20Home%20No%20Homeland%20V2.0%20(3).pdf).

16. See Mel Frykberg, Sunday, October 12, 2014. “Judaisation Means Housing Crisis for Palestinians in East Jerusalem”, Inter Press Service News Agency @ <http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/10/judaisation-means-housing-crisis-for-palestinians-in-east-jerusalem/> and recent interview with Jeff Halper with The Real News: “Jerusalem and the Fate of Palestinians” @http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=12564#.VF5nGTKLpa8.facebook.

17. Jody Rudoren and Said Ghazali, Thursday, October 31, 2014. “Contested Site in Jerusalem Reopens for Muslim Worship”. The New York Times @ <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2014/11/01/world/middleeast/jerusalem-al-aksa-mosque-temple-mount-noble-sanctuary.html>.

18. Objectives page of Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful Movement found @ <http://templemountfaithful.org/objectives.php>.

19. “Rightist lawyer, rabbis enter Aqsa compound”, Wednesday November 3, 2013. Maans News Agency. @ <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=680859>.

20. Peter Beaumont. Thursday, November 6, 2014. “Binyamin Netanyahu rejects calls to let Jews pray at Jerusalem holy site”. The Guardian @ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/06/binyamin-netanyahu-prayers-noble-sanctuary-temple-mount>.

and directing house evictions and demolitions, effectively altering the demographic reality of the city.

Critics of Israel's policy of *fait accompli* claim that the push to construct more settlements aimed to undermine the two-state solution by building Israeli infrastructure that will disable any possibility for the city to become a viable capital for a future Palestinian state. They are not wrong. In a recent op-ed in the New York Times, Israel's Minister of Economy and the leader of the Jewish Home Party, explained: "for its security, Israel cannot withdraw from more territory and cannot allow for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank. If we were to pull out of the West Bank, the entire country would become a target for terrorists who would be able to set up rocket launchers adjacent to the Old City of Jerusalem and on the hills above the runways of Ben-Gurion International Airport and the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange."²¹ He is essentially proposing to continue annexing Palestinian land to Israel and create nothing short of Palestinian Bantustans. As such, the continuous annexation speaks to a greater reality: Israel does not aim to settle for a two-state solution, consequently, do not think Palestinians are entitled to their future capital in East Jerusalem and as such, do not see any issue with annexing occupied East Jerusalem to the Israeli map.

In effect, Israeli right-wing activist in collaboration with members of the Knesset are appropriating a combination of religious and security discourse to justify their aggression on the Temple Mount specifically, in East Jerusalem more broadly. They have chosen to speak of their claims through the lens of religious warfare. Loyal to the Zionist ideology, these groups find legitimacy of their intimidation and bullying of Palestinian population and space through their religious claims to the land and their self-proclaimed unique security condition. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister of Israel will divorce himself and his cabinet from right-wing activities on the holy sites, despite sending his se-

curity forces to protect them, all the while continuing the judaisation process by expanding settlements and forcing Palestinians out of their homes and neighborhoods in East Jerusalem.

ECHOS OF JERUSALEM

For Palestinians, Israeli harassment and intimidation of Palestinians in Jerusalem should be observed in a wider context of military crackdown that has been taking place in the rest of the West Bank since the popular unrest in the West Bank over the war crimes committed by Israel in Gaza this summer.²² More broadly, it is part and parcel of the greater policy of Israeli collective punishment of Palestinians. Indeed, the events of Jerusalem must be contextualized in the intensification of Israeli military aggression in the last couple of months in the West Bank and Gaza.

In Gaza, Palestinians are dealing with the aftermath of Israeli massive rebuilding of the city after the belligerent attack of this past summer. According to OCHA, as of October 15 2014, 2,205 Palestinians have been killed, including at least 1,483 civilians, of whom 521 are children and 283 are women. Over 500,000 Palestinians displaced at the height of the hostilities; Over 100,000 still displaced. Approximately 18,000 housing units have been destroyed or severely damaged, bringing approximately 108,000 Palestinians homeless.²³

In the West Bank, a systematic targeting and killing of Palestinians by Israeli forces and settlers has been underway since the kidnapping episode (see perspective on Gaza). In less than 3 months, Israeli forces in the West Bank ransacked houses in Hebron, Nablus, Bethlehem, making their way even in the streets of Israeli-restricted, Ramallah. Over 500 Palestinians were arrested without charge to be placed in administrative detention, most of which were Palestinians who

21. Naftali Bennet. Wednesday, November 5, 2014. "For Israel, Two-State Is No Solution". New York Times. @<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/06/opinion/naftali-bennett-for-israel-two-state-is-no-solution.html>.

22. For review of War committed under Operation Protective Edge, please refer to recently published (November 5, 2014) report; "Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories: Families Under the Rubble: Israeli Attacks on Inhabited Homes" from Amnesty International @ <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE15/032/2014/en>.

23. OCHA, Situation Overview @<http://www.ochaopt.org/content.aspx?id=1010361>.

had just been recently released from Israeli prisons in the latest deal with Tel Aviv over the abducted Israeli soldier. Just recently, on October 19th, 2014, in the town of Sinjil, a 5 year old Palestinian girl was run over by an Israeli settler car in broad daylight, the settler was not convicted with any charges.²⁴

In neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, Israel has allowed for house demolitions and evictions, arresting Palestinian who refuse to leave their homes. On October 31st, a three-month-old Jewish baby was killed when a Palestinian man hit at least seven people with his car as they were crossing the light rail in East Jerusalem. The man, who was shot and killed by Israeli police after attempting to leave the scene, was a resident of the Silwan neighborhood, which has been systematic house eviction and demolition by Israeli authorities. On October 31st a 14-year-old Palestinian was shot dead by IDF troops in the neighborhood of Silwan, where Jewish settlers moved in earlier this week, to the outrage of Palestinian residents throughout occupied East Jerusalem. Recently, Israeli police shot dead a 22 year Palestinian, Khayr al-Din al-Hamdan from Kafr Kana, though he didn't not present any threat.²⁵

While the last 2 months have shown a great deal of confrontation between Palestinians of Israel and security forces, the injustice Palestinians in East Jerusalem have endured holds a legacy that speaks to currently tensions East Jerusalem. Israel has forbidden Palestinians to build new homes, effectively creating an artificial shortage of some 25,000 housing units for Israelis in the Palestinian sector, while Palestinians are not able to access most of the Jewish neighborhoods. The result of this today is a total of 70 percent of Palestinians live under the poverty line, they are forced to move outside the Jerusalem borders to acquire affordable housing where they can be stripped legally of their Jerusalem residency.²⁶ In fact, since 1967, Israel

has revoke about 50,000 Palestinians from their Jerusalem residency.²⁷

INTERNATIONALIZING THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

Conversations about Jerusalem were on the agenda between state officials and international bodies this year. In May 2014, the United Nations United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights, in collaboration with the Republic of Turkey and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation, held a conference in Ankara, Turkey, specifically dealing with the question of Jerusalem. While invited to attend, Israel did not send its delegation to the "International Meeting on the Question of Jerusalem". The main aim of the conference was to "Strengthening international support for a just and lasting solution of the question of Jerusalem." The conference shed light on important nuances to solve the issue.

Palestinians will never sacrifice their sovereignty over the City. What needs to be done is to breakdown the status quo in the City. This can be done through a strategy that encompasses the Palestinian cause as a whole: Indeed, internationalizing the question of Palestine and making the occupation too costly for Israel is an important step to arrive at a just solution. For one, there can be the creation of an International Convention on the protection of Holy Sites which can be paired with the Establishment of a permanent presence of the international community, including the UN, the OIC and other organizations in Jerusalem. It is also important to consider that the new status of Palestine as UN Observer State provides a huge opportunity to advance Palestine's case through international legal instruments. Abbas has only been threatening Israel with such a tool, but it is time to take this option seriously.

Other than the United Nations and the ICC, concrete diplomatic measures can and should be undertaken by Jordan, Turkey, the European Union and the United States. Publicly condoning the settlements

24. "5-year-old Palestinian girl hit by settler car succumbs to wounds" <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=734030>.

25. Hassan Shaalan. "VIDEO: Police shoot dead youth holding knife" Ynet News @ <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4589386,00.html>.

26. Jeff Halper. An Israeli in Palestine: Resisting Dispossession, Redeeming Israel The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (2012) p.142.

27. <http://www.un.org/depts/dpa/qpal/docs/2014Ankara/Chairman's%20Summary%20Ankara%20FINAL.pdf>.

does not prevent Israel from building them, but sanctioning Israeli one and for all but cutting some of the 8 billion dollars in military service, for example, could prove fruitful. While the European Union followed suit on Sweden's move to declare Palestine a state this past week, it needs to provide greater support for a lasting solution by accepting to implement clear cut sanctions on Israel for its belligerent activities.²⁸

On the other hand, attention should not only be on the United States and the EU. The Muslim and Arab world has its fair share of responsibility in denouncing the state bullying of Palestinians by Israel. In an interview with Al Jazeera, Sheikh Yousef Adeis, Palestinian Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs explained: "Muslims and Arabs should develop a united stance towards defending the mosque... Israel, by its aggressive acts, is pushing for religious warfare that would have dreadful consequences on the region."²⁹ The Turkish government, who has co-sponsored the

conference on Jerusalem this past summer, has also been quite vocal in answering the call of Minister Adeis. Prime Minister Davutoglu aims to see a greater role played by the United Nations, arguing that Jerusalem is not limited to a political issue but represented an important cultural inheritance that could be cannot be minimized a single religion or ethnicity, as Israel is attempting to create.

Israel has emerged unchallenged despite the level of its impunity this year. This evasion speaks to the international pattern where state actors will voice outrage against its impunity, but do not follow up with concrete sanctions. The Israeli administration will practice as much power over Palestinian private and public spaces as the international community allows it to. With growing awareness of its impunity through transnational advocacy groups such as the Boycott Divestment Sanction campaign, it is time that government officials and international organization answer the call and sanction diplomatically, militarily and economically a state that is ready to impose its colonial ambitions over Palestinian space, even on to Holy Heritage Sites.

28. Saturday, November 8, 2014. "EU foreign chief calls for Palestinian State". Al Jazeera English.

29. Al Jazeera Staff. Thursday, November 7, 2014. "Israel 'pushing for religious warfare". Al Jazeera English @ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middle-east/2014/11/israel-pushing-religious-warfare-201411712126561877.html>.



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