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Losing Jerusalem

By the end of July 2005, it is expected that the Israeli Apartheid Wall will encircle all of Jerusalem, imprisoning the 240,000 or so Palestinians living there. Israel has made no secret of its desire to 'Judaize' the whole of Jerusalem, and it has undertaken a steady project to do this since it captured and occupied East Jerusalem in 1967.

Uri Bank, a leader of the pro-settlement Moledet party, clarified the Israeli method when he stated: "We break up Arab continuity and their claim to East Jerusalem by putting in isolated islands of Jewish presence in areas of Arab population. Then we definitely try to put these together to form our own continuity. It's just like Lego's - you put the pieces out there and connect the dots. That is Zionism. That is the way the state of Israel was built. Our eventual goal is Jewish continuity in all of Jerusalem."

Israel's land policy in Jerusalem has prevented any Palestinian houses from being legitimately built, as no building permits are issued to Palestinians. This has strangled the natural growth in the city, and thus some have built properties without the requisite permit. These are now being demolished by the Israeli's, even though some have been there for decades.

Israel has turned its attention to the Silwan district of Jerusalem which is close to the Old City, and was almost exclusively Palestinian until Jewish settlers started to buy up the land and use other unorthodox means of acquiring property there, including using false documents supplied by Arab collaborators to classify Palestinian houses as "absentee property". The Israel Lands Authority and the Jewish National Fund also allotted much of Silwan to the settlers without offering it up for tender first and public funds have been used to finance the settlers' legal expenses.

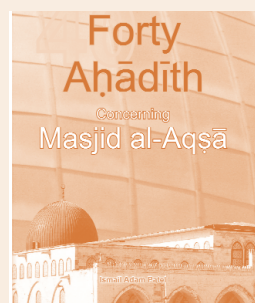
Silwan is being used by the Israeli government to appease the angry settlers opposed to the Gaza pull-out. Silwan has been named "The City of David" by the Israeli authorities, and is considered the site where the city of Jerusalem began. Israeli settlers have begun an aggressive campaign to remove Palestinians from the place, with discreet help from the government. It was announced in late May that one whole neighbourhood is to be demolished, consisting of 88 homes housing over 1,000 Palestinians.

Settlers have built a seven storey apartment block in the heart of Silwan without planning permission, which overlooks the area, with a huge Israeli flag sitting on top. It is unlikely that Israel will demolish this property, as it has so readily demolished Palestinian properties in the area.

FoA Receives Accreditation from UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

FoA is continually trying to expand its campaign for freedom in Palestine, and has recently been accepted as part of the United Nations network of civil society organisations active on the question of Palestine. This is an important step in expanding FoA's role on the international stage in influencing international policy on the issue of the Middle East Conflict.

FoA will take an active role in global UN conferences and meetings to put forward the case for protecting Masjid al-Aqsa and the human rights of the Palestinian people. It is clear that NGOs have played a huge role in bringing about change in recent decades, most notably the pressure that was brought on the apartheid South African government prior to the collapse of the apartheid regime. FoA hopes that the role of NGOs on the question of Palestine will achieve the same results.



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Heightened Danger for Masjid al-Aqsa

Over the past three months, the risk of an attack on Masjid al-Aqsa has increased due to the absence of justice where crimes are perpetrated against the Palestinians in general and Masjid al-Aqsa in particular. Extremist Israeli's have taken this as a green light, and early in April 2005, the Israeli Shin Bet security service was forced to acknowledge that the ranking of the risk of an attack on Masjid al-Aqsa had risen to 7 on the 1-10 scale. In recent days this was further raised to level 8 as the vociferous Israeli extremists continue with their plots and plans.

The destruction of the Masjid al-Aqsa has been the desire of a few Jewish extremists groups since the occupation began in 1967. However, in recent years it appears this aspiration has steadily gained Israeli public support and even the quiet nod of the Israeli government. On Monday 16 May, the Israeli Police released five Israeli Jews who had plotted to blow up the Masjid al-Aqsa. The five were reportedly part of two groups; one group was planning to fire a Lau anti-tank missile at the Masjid al-Aqsa then commit suicide on the roof of a Yeshiva in the Old City of Jerusalem. The second group planned to fly a small aircraft, loaded with explosive, into the al-Aqsa Sanctuary. The reason given by the Police for the release of these would be terrorists was that they had not been able to carry out their plans and hence could not be charged.

Another threat was made against Masjid al-Aqsa on 6 June, a day celebrated throughout Israel as it marked the anniversary of the 1967 occupation of East Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinian territories. Israel's subsequent annexation of Jerusalem was and is illegal under International Law and remains condemned by the UN. Prior to 6th June, numerous extremist Israeli groups openly called on Jews to storm the Masjid al-Aqsa, in order to perform their rituals within it.

When the Jewish extremists attempted to enter the compound, they were warded off by Palestinians who acted as a shield for the Masjid against the attack. The deliberate provocation

was intended to draw violent Palestinian response, thus giving the Israeli forces an excuse to fire at the crowd. This was curbed by the Palestinian security guards within the al-Aqsa compound, although the Israeli Police still fired smoke and stun grenades into the crowds of Palestinians on the grounds.

The official story reported by the Israeli Police for their use of such brutal force against the Palestinians was that 'the Palestinians threw stones at a Jewish group touring the al-Aqsa'. In response to the attack, Hamas launched 3 rockets into an Israeli border town next to Gaza, causing no injuries. Hamas released a statement saying: "Any harm that befalls al-Aqsa mosque will mean an open, fierce war in all of our land of Palestine, and by all means".

In the light of recent heightened threat to Masjid al-Aqsa and the failure of the Israeli Occupying forces to bring to justice the provocateurs, it is extremely important for the international community to send a strong statement of condemnation to Israel for its failure to protect an occupied people and their religious sites, as is required under international law. It is also time to consider an international security force in Jerusalem to safeguard the Masjid al-Aqsa. The international community and in particular the Muslims for whom Masjid al-Aqsa forms one of the greatest symbols of Islam; need to be vigilant against the Israeli Occupying forces' indifference to the Jewish extremist threats to destroy the Masjid al-Aqsa.

EU and the British Government in Talks with Hamas

Foreign Office Officials confirmed that British diplomats have met with members of Hamas. However Mr Jack Straw subsequently went on to say that the British government would have no dealings with the leaders of Hamas, which was branded a terrorist group following Israeli demands. European diplomats have also had a number of meetings with Hamas politicians since the group's recent successes in elections in the West Bank and Gaza.

Hamas has a number of wings, and its military wing, the Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigade has been responsible for numerous resistance attacks against Israel, usually in response to attacks by Israel against Palestinians. However, Hamas is primarily a social organisation catering for the needs of Palestinians under occupation, providing health care, education and other basic necessities to an impoverished population.

Mailing List

FoA send out daily updates on the events in Palestine. To join the mailing list, please visit www.aqsa.org.uk and subscribe your email to the mailing list.

Breakdown in Law and Order in the Occupied Territories

The occupation of Palestinian land has led to a breakdown of the society on many levels including its legal and judicial organs. In early June, many lawyers held a "one day warning strike" to protest against the treatment, assaults and intimidation against the '3 arms of the law', which are the judges, the public prosecuting attorneys and the defence lawyers.

The Palestinian authority's legislative and executive bodies have a duty to protect the judicial system, but they have failed to do this and thus lawyers now operate in unsafe circumstances, under the pressure of threats emanating from the 'gangs' that are emerging in the Palestinian territories. Many Palestinians find recourse to the courts does not bring them justice and have lost faith in the legal system, and thus many more are turning to these gangs to resolve their problems. Even where court rulings are obtained, there is a wide lack of implementation of the rulings, thus resulting in very little practical significance of judgements. In addition, violence within courtrooms is fast becoming more than simply isolated incidents.

Each court has a huge number of cases to deal with each day, and closures of towns within the territories by the Israelis exacerbate the situation by causing huge back logs of cases. The desperate situation created by the occupation is fuelling this breakdown in the legal system within the Palestinian territories, and may lead to a law-less state unless and until the occupation is brought to an end.

Boycott Campaign is Accelerating

The call for boycotting Israel is getting louder, with virtually all supporters of freedom in Palestine, whether organisations or individuals, calling for more intense boycotting at all levels. Pressure on the economic, social and academic front is now beginning to be felt in Israel.

In the US, the Presbyterian Church paved the way by announcing its divestment from and boycott of Israel. In the UK, the Association of University Teachers also moved to boycott two Israeli universities that are complicit in the displacement of Palestinians. Although this boycott was not upheld, it was a strong signal of the views of the British academics on the actions of Israel against the Palestinians.

FoA encourages all supporters to continue boycotting Israeli goods in the supermarkets and encouraging others to do so, and taking other action such as joining the pickets that are held outside Marks & Spencer's stores across the country. Apartheid South Africa was brought down by mass international boycott, and so too will Israel be brought down until it ends the occupation and gives the Palestinian people their rights.

Palestinian Elections Postponed

Palestinian elections were due to be held on July 17th, but were postponed without reason by PA President Mahmud Abbas. This highly questionable move has received very little international attention, but appears to be a clear move by Abbas; supported by the US and Britain, to block any potential Hamas victories. Hamas came out strong in local elections held in Gaza in May, and accuses Mahmud Abbas of postponing the elections for this reason, as Abbas fears defeat and needs more time to gain extra support

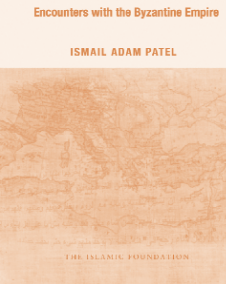
It is beyond belief that Mr Bush and Mr Blair, whose every other word on the Middle East is to do with 'Democracy', have remained silent at Abbas's postponement of the Palestinian elections. Would it be cynical to consider Mr Blair and Mr Bush's call for 'Democracy' in the Middle East only stands if it produces victors of their choice?

Friends of Al-Aqsa Schools Competition Winners

FoA received hundreds of entries in its 2005 schools competition, and thanks all the schools and pupils who took part. FoA hopes this is the first step in bringing the issue of Palestine back into discussion in British schools. The List of Winners are:

	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
Cat A	Mohammad Maaz Brandwood School Bolton £100	Zakariyya Sacha Paradise Primary School Dewsbury £75	Aamir Hussain Normanton House Primary School, Derby £50
Cat B	Anisa Shamoan Islamia School Nottingham £150	Azra Motala Azharul Madaaris Bradford £100	Ruqayyah Steel Al-Muntada School London £50
Cat C	Seraj Shebani Coventry £200	Ain Azman Bradford £125	Hafsa Bashir Sattar Jamea al-Kauthar Lancashire £50

Madina to Jerusalem



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168 Pages

Palestine & Palestinians describes places rooted in Palestinian memory: sites which bear witness to a history. It also presents the contemporary tragedy and struggle of a people seeking recognition of their rights.

The book offers practical information as transport, hotels, cafes, restaurants, museums, hiking routes, cultural centres, etc. so you may plan your own multifaceted visit.

As a guidebook, Palestine & Palestinians is a comprehensive guide to Palestine, including those parts of Israel where Palestinian culture and traditional hospitality still thrive.

It provides enough material for those readers who prefer to travel far and wide in the comfort of their own armchairs. It can also be used as a reliable guidebook for regular tourists.



Palestine – Beginner's Guide

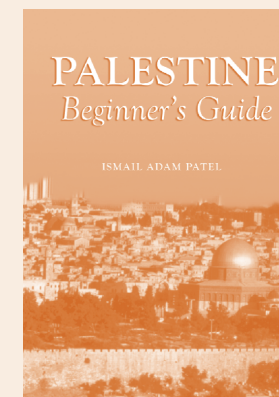
Has been prepared in a simple format to aid understanding of the Holy Land's history and to grasp why this once pluralist land is now the capital of faith-based sectarianism.

- traces chronologically the events in Palestine from 6,000 BC to 2004;
- offers a wealth of information and facts;
- counters the myths that have been spun around the issue of Palestine;
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