

## AL-AQSA

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### WE WELCOME

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It must be remembered while the Muslims, in and out of Palestine, take to demonstrations with slogans of Jihad and revenge, only later to retreat to the comfort of their homes forfeiting their duties onto the phantom others.

**P**raise be to Allah, The Cherisher and

*Sustainer*

*of the Worlds, who has said repel evil with that which is good: May Allah's blessing be upon all His Prophets from Adam to His final Messenger, Muhammad.*

As the world leaders offer warm embraces and the media hail Barak as the man searching for peace, most observers with any knowledge and humanitarian concerns of 'facts on the ground' lay frozen on their mental stride.

In today's International arena, Israel's mere contemplation of cessation from aggression in illegally occupied territories is considered as a commendable act of peace. While the violations of human rights at all levels against the Palestinians are purged by the leaders of most International communities from their moral conscious. Those concerned with the humanitarian violation of barbaric proportions need to re-evaluate their strategies in order to bring about sustainable peace and reconciliation in Palestine.

Having recently noticed and experienced at first hand, the apartheid Israeli policies of house demolitions, confiscation of ID cards, restriction of movement, obstructions to practice one's faith, detention without evidence and wanton harassment in and around Jerusalem. Further, in the absence of any substantial International condemnation, one can comprehend the mental reasoning of those who rush to pick up arms as the only means to solve the problem.

Not only have the governments of Western countries become aphasic to the Palestinian needs but the dictatorial leaders of Muslim countries' are also succumbing to the malaise. Under the present circumstances where the tilt in the balance of power and political alignment is in favour of Zionism those with humanitarian concerns outside Palestine need to formulate peaceful policies, which will go towards shaping a brighter future in the region. Thus creating an atmosphere where the inhabitants of the land of Palestine are directed to live on equitable terms, whether they are Jews, Christians or Muslims.

**O**

While the Zionists, proclaim to no slogans of ethnic cleansing or employing an apartheid regime. However their deeds have been far more devastating than any statement or slogan could achieve. The Muslims have played into the hands of the Zionist conspiracy in so far as the media is given an opportunity to portray the wailing and screaming demonstrators, from deliberate provocation and label them as fundamentalists. While the spot-light of the world is focused on the mere slogans of the Muslims the much more sinister deeds of ethnically cleansing Palestinians by the Zionist is diverted from the worlds gaze.

Although most countries abhor Israel's apartheid policies, it must be accepted by even the most causal supporter of the Palestinians that there is no single country in the world today which is pro-actively working towards the liberation of the Palestinian people. While the Zionist literally have the world at their feet and with the support of the USA they are free to dictate the terms of negotiations, the timetable or framework of any discussions. Above and beyond that Israel has no respect for any international law, UN resolutions, Hague or Geneva Convention and Human Rights Declarations.

With 'facts on the ground' drastically changed in favour of the Jews and in the absence of any International Governments concerted effort to rescind Israeli violations, practical measures by the citizens of the free world for a humanitarian cause is called for. Of the many means one can employ and should be employed in the liberation of the Palestinians the following four at present need the greatest effort and devotion:

1. Information: First and foremost the world population needs to be more efficiently, coherently and passionately be informed about the sufferings and

oppression of the Palestinian people. It must be admitted under the present status quo, after 50 years of Zionist oppression the world has still not fully woken up to the atrocities and victimisation of the

Palestinians. This is not a sign of the Zionist superiority in disseminating propaganda for their course but a weakness and perhaps a

mis-direction of efforts by those concerned. Companies such as Burger King who recently with the Palestinian humanitarian issues. The opened a branch in the settlement of Ma'ale people in the field have concentrated for far Adumin exclusively for Jews need to be too long on the gross reporting, legal jargon, lobbied and better informed of the political and historical thesis while missing out consequences of their actions.

the human element. The effect on the world of being informed of four million refugees or Palestine must be encouraged to educate the UN resolution 242 has been much like being told about the FT or Dow Jones Index, which we all know is important but has no emotional or personal impact on the majority. Whereas, if the reporting was brought down to a personal level, highlighting the sufferings and atrocities to private individuals, these would have the impact on the society of being told on the changes to their personal taxation, wages or weekly working hours. People would be able to relate with these facts at their own personal level and one can then touch the emotions and hope to awaken the conscious of the people, for a possible platform to begin a grass root support. The only balance of power we at present are capable of tilting is that of the world opinion and not governments. It is this 'people' power we need to endeavour to harness in order to tilt the balance of opinion in our favour for peace, reconciliation and sustainable existence of a multicultural and a multifaith society in Palestine.

2. Boycott: Those in the West must begin a campaign and expose companies which are supporting the state of Israel either via direct donations, indirectly by trading with it or assisting in consolidating illegal settlements in the occupied territories. It is true there is no law against trading with Israel. However, neither was there an economic embargo against apartheid South Africa but an efficient campaign against companies such as Barclays Bank bore fruits. I believe the people have a right to know and be informed where and whom their Pound is ending up in suppressing. The companies actively involved in propping up the apartheid regime need to be discouraged, at present no doubt a mammoth task, but if we do not try we have no hope in succeeding. Many fruits on British supermarket shelves are exported from the occupied territories, illegal under EU law and achieved through cheap labour and exploitation of the Palestinian workforce.

Tour companies arranging holidays to travellers of the importance of their destination. They should not only see it as fortnight in the sun, beach and down history lane but where an oppressed people are suffering to be heard and denied to live in equality with their neighbours. An important factor to be pointed out here concerns Muslims from the West who find it almost impossible to use these travel agents as invariably their hotels are in Jewish quarters, an apartheid policy which need to be exposed.

3. Charitable Projects: Since Oslo, funds from the international governments and organisations have been diverted away from the needy refugees, orphans, schools, universities and even hospitals to Fatah and in particular Arafat. Unfortunately the economic hardship at present has been the most acute since the crisis began and all those charitable institutes that support Palestinian people and organisations from scout groups to universities must not only be assisted but encouraged. The undertaking of the welfare of Palestinian people and institutes forms a moral obligation under the Israeli onslaught.

4. Media Watch: In the global village the media forms the umbilical cord feeding us with news and shaping our sympathy. Unfortunately in the UK and perhaps even throughout Europe the biased or mis reporting of events of facts on the ground are not challenged as often enough as they should be. Allowing the editors to not only escape with their prejudiced views but to continue with their campaign of tilting the balance of view. Under the present circumstances every individual must be encouraged to reply on any biased reporting and all organisations concerned with the Palestinian issue must have a member reviewing the media.

No doubt since the Palestinian issue

has become chronic and western governments with their passivity are in effect acknowledging the status quo the previous means to remedy the affliction need not only to be re-evaluated but new strategies need to be employed. What is being advocated here is the creation of

world lobby towards enforcing a creation of a State where Palestinians as well as Jews should and must live as equals. Anything short of this, through Oslo or Wye will only be a compromise for the Palestinians and insecurity for Israel.

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## From Dheisheh to Masjid

Israelis started imposing a siege on

### Al-Aqsa Muna Hamzeh-Muhaisen\*



of the  
bag,  
looking  
dried and  
twisted.  
“Let’s  
go,” she  
tells

Halimeh as she gets to her feet. The two women plod into the camp, as if pilgrims back from hard travels. “I’ll see you next Friday,” murmurs Halimeh as she and Sheikha part ways. “God willing! If we are alive,” answers Sheikha as she bids her friend farewell.

**But she vividly recalls when Jerusalem was**

Sheikha can hardly remember when the Damascus Gate Main Entrance to the Old

City **S**heikha finds a spot in the

shade and sits

down to catch her breath. The relatively short trip from Jerusalem to Dheisheh under the scorching July sun has sapped her aging, sick body. Without speaking, she motions her longtime friend Halimeh to sit next to her. Halimeh slumps down on the dusty rock. “We’re almost home,” she gasps. Sheikha doesn’t answer. Her

large bosom heaves and she winces from the pain. She closes her eyes and fantasises about an ice-cold glass of water cooling her dry throat. She opens her eyes and licks her dry lips with her parched tongue. “Oh God Almighty! Have mercy on us from this awful heat,” she whispers and grabs the edge of her white head cover to

wipe her sweaty face. The two women sit there, afraid to get up and face the sun that has been glaring at them all day. It wasn't so bad in the early hours of the morning when they started off for al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem to attend the Friday prayer. But now, at 3 pm, the heat was too much to bear and the thought of having to walk up the hill before reaching home was hellish. Nearly ten minutes pass before Sheikha shifts her weary body. She reaches down for the plastic shopping bag resting by her swollen feet. Four loaves of sesame bread stick out Jerusalem, making it impossible for West Bank Palestinians to get to the city without having to carry Israeli-issued permits and go through military checkpoints. But she vividly recalls when Jerusalem was simply there, accessible, reachable, and open to all Palestinians. "Even at the height of the Intifada, we didn't need permits," she says. "Can you imagine that? We used to come and go to Jerusalem as we pleased. Things were different then. Starkly different." Between 1977-1989, Sheikha worked as a cleaning woman at Hebrew University. She and nearly ten other women from Dheisheh camp worked on the Mount Scopus campus, making the trip to Jerusalem six days a week for twelve straight years. "There were no check points at the entrance to Jerusalem and no one ever stopped us to ask for permits," she recalls. While no figures are available as to the number of Dheisheh refugees who used to work in Jerusalem in the 1970s, the number is believed to be much higher than it is today. Many Dheisheh nurses, United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) employees, journalists, construction and restaurant workers, and fruit pickers used to work in the city. Dheisheh refugees employed by UNRWA used to either work at UNRWA

**simply there, accessible,  
reachable, and open to all  
Palestinians**

\* Muna Hamzeh-Muhaisen - a journalist who has been covering Palestinian affairs since 1984. Her articles currently appear in Middle East International, Palestine Report and Pour la Palestine, among others. Re-produced courtesy of Jerusalem Quarterly File.

now, Rab'aa has been going to Jerusalem only during the Month of Ramadan, and even then, she only goes on Fridays. "I go to pray at Masjid al Aqsa. I stay all day and attend three prayers." Rab'aa doesn't like making the trip. "Sometimes the Israeli soldiers at the Bethlehem checkpoint send us back, and we have to make a long detour on foot. I'm too old for this nonsense. I remember one time that we had to go down a valley and walk up a treacherous hill just to escape the soldiers who were in pursuit. I was sick for three days after that." Rab'aa hates the whole idea of permits and refuses to apply for one. "I'm in my late 40's and a grandmother to 14 children. How can I possibly be a security threat to the Israelis if I go pray in Jerusalem?" she asks defiantly. "I always take my chances. If they let me through, then so be it, if not, then I sneak in." She laughs at the idea. "A woman like me has to sneak in! It sounds criminal, doesn't it?"



Typical Check-Point All Around Jerusalem

It is obvious to all Palestinians now that since the peace talks were initially launched, Israel has been pursuing a policy of isolating Jerusalem from the hearts and minds of West Bank and Gaza Palestinians. At first it was not entirely clear that it would be a sustained and systematic policy. At the start, when the Israelis began requiring permits from Palestinians to get into the city, many thought the closures were temporary. Soon, however, the systematic nature of the policy emerged. The Israelis made it next to impossible for students to obtain entry permits that would allow them to study at Jerusalem schools, colleges and universities. They also made it difficult for Palestinian buses and taxis to get permits, thus creating a situation where transportation into Jerusalem wasn't as easy as it used to be.

**If sneaking in to pray at Masjid al Aqsa is a crime, then the majority of the older women in Dheisheh are criminals. All the Palestinian grandmothers and great grandmothers in Dheisheh and elsewhere in Palestine are, in the eyes of the Israeli authorities, a threat to Israel's national security**

headquarters in Jerusalem or drove into Jerusalem to attend staff meetings. "Now we hold our meetings in Ramallah because the majority of UNRWA employees don't have permits to enter the city," said Hussein Shaheen, UNRWA's Camp Director in Dheisheh. Shaheen worked at UNRWA headquarters between 1973-1992 and used to drive his own car to work. Since 1992, Shaheen has been issued a three-month entry to Jerusalem only three times, but never a permit for his car. "It is very difficult to get an entry permit for a human being, so imagine what it's like getting a car permit," he said. Like most Dheisheh refugees, Shaheen hasn't been to Jerusalem in four or five years. "Jerusalem wasn't simply a place of employment, but a place where we went to attend conferences, workshops, book fairs, theater plays, and much more." Rab'aa Manna', who worked with Sheikha at Hebrew University, also remembers. "Jerusalem to us was the city next door. It was where we worked, where we went to pray on Fridays, and where we occasionally went shopping in the market of the Old City. Now, it feels like a far away place, and America appears to be more accessible to us than Jerusalem is." For several years

If sneaking in to pray at Masjid al-Aqsa is a crime, then the majority of the older women in Dheisheh are criminals. All the Palestinian grandmothers and great grandmothers in Dheisheh and elsewhere in Palestine are, in the eyes of the Israeli authorities, a threat to Israel's national security. If they were to take Israeli regulations seriously, they would all have to endure the nuisance of submitting applications for entry permits to Jerusalem and then be at the mercy of some Israeli officer who may, or may not, grant them a one-day entry permit into the city. There are no known cases where a Palestinian was issued a permit for the specific purpose of going to pray in Jerusalem. In Dheisheh, and throughout the West Bank, the increasing closure of Jerusalem since the Madrid talks in 1991 has had a profound impact on the Palestinian psyche and the way of life. Even at the height of the Intifada, Palestinians could get on the bus and ride into Jerusalem. "There would be severe clashes inside the camp, and we would go to Jerusalem without anyone asking us where we were going," recalls Sheikha. "Now, Jerusalem seems like a far away city in some foreign land."

increasingly difficult for medical patients to get permits to enter Jerusalem for medical treatment at al-Maqassed Hospital or any other Palestinian hospital in East Jerusalem. Palestinian refugees, for instance, used to get free referrals from UNRWA-operated

In addition, the Israelis made it

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clinics in the various camps for treatment at the Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives. But now, that too has changed. Because repeated closures have made it difficult for Palestinians to enter Jerusalem,

UNRWA has started referring refugee patients to other hospitals in the West Bank. Bethlehem area refugees, for instance, are now referred to al-Ahli Hospital in Hebron and, in delivery cases, to the French Hospital in

Bethlehem. Only when a particular treatment is not available in the West Bank are patients still referred to the Augusta Victoria, which has since been privatised. Furthermore, young women from the

Bethlehem area, a twenty-minute drive to downtown East Jerusalem, used to go shopping in Jerusalem, but now they go shopping in Bethlehem. Students at universities in Jerusalem have to sneak in to attend classes. In manifold and accumulating ways, the Israelis are obstructing and suffocating the everyday ways of life that have historically tied Palestinians to the city.

When you ask Dheisheh camp residents how long it has been since they've been to Jerusalem, the answers vary. Some say it has been four years, others say it has been five. "We can pack a bag and cross the Allenby Bridge into Jordan right now without even thinking about it, but we cannot even dream of hopping into a taxi and driving into Jerusalem," says Hiyam, a Dheisheh woman in her thirties who used to go into Jerusalem at least once a week to buy clothes at bargain prices from the Old City.

"What is even more ridiculous is when relatives from Jordan or the Gulf States come to visit us. They have tourist visas and go to Jerusalem any time they like,

but we cannot go inside the city. Each day they take a chance and risk getting caught. Sometimes they're lucky, other times they aren't. Sometimes the punishment is a night in prison, or a fine, or a good beating, or a few hours of punishment spent standing under the hot sun without a drink of water. It all depends on the mood of the Israeli soldier who catches the unlucky man. Meanwhile, it is Friday again. Dheisheh sleeps in on this relaxed one-day weekend and the alleys and streets rest from the snarl of traffic and the screams of children. The only people out and about this early in the morning are the grandmothers and great grandmothers. They walk down the hill in pairs or in groups of three or four. Their pace is slow but determined. Small, overstuffed shopping bags swing in their hands. A small pot of coffee, a bottle of ice water, home baked bread, a few tomatoes, olives, and perhaps a piece of goat cheese. The nourishment they will have when they sit under the shade of the olive trees in the spacious courtyard of al-Aqsa.

bargain prices. I try them on and if they don't fit, she takes them back and exchanges them. You'd think she's off to someplace in Europe and I'm asking her to buy me something that I can't get here."

Only a small number of construction workers and nurses, like Amal, work in Jerusalem and are issued permits. Others sneak past the military checkpoints in order to work



**Students at universities in Jerusalem have to sneak in to attend classes. In manifold and accumulating ways, the Israelis are obstructing and suffocating the everyday ways of life that have historically tied Palestinians to the city**

Grounds of Al-Aqsa on a Friday

go with them," complains Hiyam. "They end up going site seeing on their own, and we sit at home and wait for them to come back and tell us what it felt like to spend a day in Jerusalem. It is the most absurd and insane situation I can think of."

Hiyam's sister, Amal, works as a nurse at al-Makassed Hospital. "I rely on Amal to buy me anything I need from Jerusalem," explains Hiyam. "Sometimes she finds clothes at

First they'll attend the Friday sermon, pray, and then have their little picnic.

"My grandchildren asked for sesame bread, remind me to get some," Sheikha tells Halimeh as they emerge from Damascus Gate.

"My grandchildren want some too," Halimeh replies. "I don't know why their father can't get it for them from Bethlehem? They can eat it before its dry."

"What a silly thing to say! They know they can get it from Bethlehem, but it won't be the same. The sesame bread we're bringing has the taste and aroma of Jerusalem. Don't you get it? That's what they want..."

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# Netanyahu's Legacy

## Law-Jerusalem Unit\*

**T**he dying days of the Netanyahu

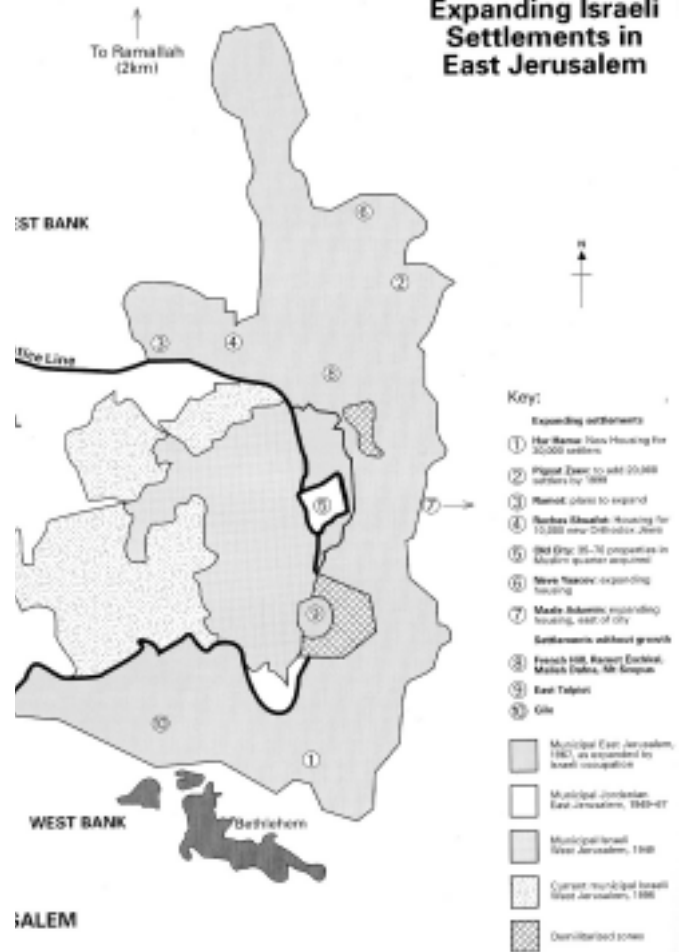
administration has seen an unparalleled assault on occupied Arab East Jerusalem by the Israeli authorities. The actions in question undertaken by the Israeli authorities include the start of construction work at Ras al-Amoud, the construction of the first dwelling units at Har Homa on Jabal Aby Ghneim, and the approval of a plan by the outgoing Defence Minister, Moshe Arens, to link ma'ale Adumim, the largest settlement in the West Bank to Jerusalem. These actions are an infringement of United Nations resolutions 242 of 1967, as well as the Oslo accords and the Fourth Geneva Conventions of 1949. All of the aforementioned actions are of great strategic significance both for Arab Jerusalem, and for the final shape of any Palestinian entity that may emerge once final status negotiations of the current Oslo process are concluded. These actions will be chronicled below, and their strategic implication for both Arab Jerusalem and the ongoing Oslo process will be examined.

### Ras al-Amoud

The plan to construct 132 dwelling units on 16 dunams of land in this Palestinian neighbourhood of 11,000 inhabitants has proved one the most controversial settlement projects in Jerusalem. American businessman Irving Moscowitz owns the land for this settlement project. Moscowitz is well known for his support of some of the most radical settler groups on the Israeli political scene and has been eager to see his project come to fruition, regardless of the possible political consequences for Israeli-Palestinian relations.

The Ras al-amoud project courted controversy right from its conception in

## Expanding Israeli Settlements in East Jerusalem



September 1997. What is particularly significant about the project in question, is its location in the heart of an overwhelmingly Palestinian neighbourhood and is thus bound to be a source of

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\* LAW - Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment, Jerusalem Unit of the Economics, Social and Cultural Rights Project of Law - the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment. Affiliate to the International Commission of Jurists and the Federation International des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme. This report is prepared as part of Jerusalem Watch - a joint effort between Law and the Palestinian Non-Governmental Organisations' Network (PNGO).

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**The eventual  
completion of a ring of  
settlements  
around  
Jerusalem's  
Palestinian  
neighbourhoods will sever Arab  
Jerusalem's link to its natural  
West Bank hinterland**

The order to actually begin construction on the project was repeatedly delayed in the past due largely to public order fears on the part of the Israeli government. However, such fears did not seem to stand in the way on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1999, when earth was finally broken at the site to lay the groundwork for the construction of the project.

**Har Homa**

Two days prior to the decision to begin breaking ground in Ras al-Amoud, contractors began building the first 150 apartments at another contested settlement site, Jabal Abu Ghneim. Ever since the Netanyahu government gave the final go ahead for the project in March 1997, it has proved extremely controversial. The decision by the government caused a 19-month hiatus in the current Oslo process and considerable international condemnation.

The plan for the HarHoma project is to include 6,000 dwelling units with the intention of housing approximately 30,000 Jews. The project includes plans for shopping centres, landscape parks, hotels and a public swimming pool. The decision by the Israeli authorities to construct Har Homa is extremely significant because it will close the ring

**EI plan will  
more or less  
suffocate the  
development  
of Arab  
Jerusalem**

the eastern Palestinian villages of Jerusalem. This fits in with the over all pattern of settlement in Jerusalem where one of the primary aims is to disrupt the continuity of the Palestinian areas.

of settlements in the south east of the city, and will encircle the Palestinian neighbourhoods in its vicinity. The eventual completion of a ring of settlements around Jerusalem's Palestinian neighbourhoods will sever Arab Jerusalem's link to its natural West Bank hinterland.

### Ma'ale Adumim Expansion

However, the most significant move by the outgoing government was the decision by the Defence Minister Moshe Arens to approve a Master Plan that will link Ma'ale Adumim to Jerusalem. Ma'ale Adumim, with a population of approximately 20-23,000 inhabitants in an area of 60,000 dunams is the largest settlement in the West Bank. Ma'ale Adumim was the first settlement in the West Bank to be declared a city by the Israeli authorities in October 1992. The settlement is bordered by Jerusalem approximately 4.5 kilometres to the west, and the settlement of Mitzpeh Jericho to the east. Most of the land within the boundaries of the settlement is uninhabited. There exists only 14 kilometres between the boundaries of the settlement and the Jordan River, which

gives an indication of the vast scale of the settlement. Another indication of the scale of the Ma'ale Adumim area can be gleaned from a comparison with Tel Aviv, a city of approximately 350,000 inhabitants in an area of 51,000 dunams.<sup>1</sup>

The approved Master Plan connects the area west of Ma'ale Adumim with the lands near the Palestinian Jerusalem villages of A-Zaim and Issawiya. This will increase the municipal boundaries of the settlement by 10,000 dunams. The plan to link Ma'ale Adumim to Jerusalem was formulated in 1993 under the Labour-Meretz government (1992-1996) with the active promotion of the then Minister for Housing, Benyamin Ben Eliezer. The existing plan to link Ma'ale Adumim to Jerusalem goes by the name E1. The E1 plan is more one for the development of infrastructure than for dwelling units. Only 1,500 dwelling units are a part of the plan. Industrial and tourist facilities, nature reserves, public institutions and ten hotels make up the bulk of the plan. The full implementation of the E1 plan will disrupt the only prospective Palestinian passage route still capable of linking Arab Jerusalem's disparate neighbourhoods as well as the northern and southern regions of the West Bank.

According to some commentators the implementation of the E1 plan will more or less suffocate the development of Arab Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

Ma'ale Adumim has also been at the centre of the so-called Greater Jerusalem scheme which incorporates a number of plans that have been put forward in the last few years by the Israeli authorities. The planning concept of the Greater Jerusalem scheme encompasses the ring of outlying settlement around Arab Jerusalem, from the Etzion bloc, which includes a number of settlements of varying sizes; and Efrat in the south, to Keidar, Ma'ale Adumim, Almon and Adam in the east, to Psagot and Givat Zeev to the north and to Beitar in the west.

In January 1993, a special committee of Housing and Interior Ministry officials gave the go ahead for a team of Israeli planners, architects, legal and economic experts to draw up a plan to develop a Greater Jerusalem area. In a 1995 inter-ministerial committee meeting, a new large-scale development plan was finalised for a region, which covered as much as 40% of the West Bank. This particular plan went

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by the name of the Metropolitan Jerusalem plan and delineated three borders for Jerusalem, the municipal border, the Greater Jerusalem border and the Metropolitan border. On the 21<sup>st</sup> June 1998, another Greater Jerusalem plan was announced that would in effect lead to the annexation of land around Jerusalem and formalise a Greater Jerusalem via an umbrella of municipal councils, i.e. settlements. This plan entails the inclusion of both Ma'ale Adumim and Givat Zeev into Jerusalem and the accelerated construction of link roads to both the settlements around the city and to the city directly. This plan also incorporates the Metropolitan Jerusalem plan.



Bypass for the convenience of Jewish Settlers on what was Previously Palestinian Residential Area

Considerable investment has been channelled towards the settlements in the Greater Jerusalem area and it has been estimated that since 1981, 83% of Government investment directed to the occupied territories has been towards the settlements that will now seemingly make up the Greater Jerusalem region.<sup>3</sup> It has also been estimated that 77% of the settler

population in the West Bank live in the Greater Jerusalem settlements.<sup>4</sup> Ma'ale Adumim has been promoted as the new eastern limit of Jerusalem and is to be the limit of the Greater Jerusalem scheme.

The decision by the outgoing Defense Minister to bring the boundaries of Ma'ale Adumim up to Jerusalem will in effect cut the West Bank in two as well as complete the encirclement of Arab Jerusalem, and here lies the significance of this decision. The contours of any Palestinian entity that may emerge once the Oslo process is concluded will be far from contiguous. Already, the areas of dense Palestinian population, now under the control of the Palestinian National Authority, Area A, are surrounded by Israeli held territory with no continuity between them at all. The extension of Ma'ale Adumim to Jerusalem will only increase the haphazard areas under Palestinian

authority and will make the possibility of a viable state encompassing the Gaza Strip and the West Bank virtually impossible.

### **Barak's Responsibilities**

These decisions taken by the outgoing Likud led government presents the newly elected Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, with very clear choices and will give an indication of the direction he intends to take his government on the issue of peace with Palestinians. In politics, the art of prediction is a dangerous pursuit and at times can be sheer folly nevertheless on occasions there exist pointers that help to give an indication of a possible direction, which may or may not prove to be accurate. With Ehud Barak these pointers do exist, but they do not point to an optimistic future, at least with regards to Jerusalem.

Throughout his electoral campaign, Barak stated clearly that in any future

negotiations with the Palestinians, his government had clear red lines. These red lines include no return to the 1967 borders, most settlements will remain in blocs and under Israeli sovereignty, no foreign army along the Jordan valley and Jerusalem to be preserved as the undivided capital of the State of Israel. During his campaign Barak also made the memorable statement that the settlements Ofra and Bet El will remain forever. Moreover, the political legacy of the Labour movement in Israel does not inspire the hope that Barak will some how make the grandest gesture of all, and withdraw to the June 1967 borders. The Labour movement, being the leading political coalition in Israel up to 1977, not only was the leading political force in the 1948 war that led to the flight of a considerable number of the Palestinian population, but was also responsible for the establishment of the first settlements in the West Bank, It was also under a Labour administration

that Jerusalem's boundaries were expanded, the first settlements established in the occupied east, Givat Shapira and Ramat Eshkol in 1968, and considerable expropriations from the Palestinian residents of the city pursued.

More recently, many of the major plans to expand the boundaries of the city occurred under the Labour administration of Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres. The Rabin government in particular, invested considerable sums in settlement expansion,

**to bring the boundaries of Ma'ale Adumim up to Jerusalem will in effect cut the West Bank in two as well as complete the encirclement of Arab Jerusalem**

and was the author of many of the major bypass roads that link the settlements to each other as well as to Jerusalem and hence laid the ground work for the possible fruition of a Greater Jerusalem area. The contours of the current Oslo process, with its canonised Palestinian areas, and the permanent closure imposed on Jerusalem since 1993, all occurred under the governments of “peace”.

The path Barak may take will to some extent depend on the coalition he eventually forms. Nevertheless, many of the partners in any Barak government will likely hail from the mainstream Zionist parties which all subscribe to the political consensus concerning a united

Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty. If Barak does buck the trend, and rescinds the order to expand Ma’ale Adumim, and halts the construction in Ras al-Amoud and Har Homa, a legacy bestowed upon him by the outgoing Netanyahu government, this could be a clear signal that may be Arab Jerusalem has a chance to develop as a Palestinian urban centre, an opportunity it has been denied since June 1967.

### **The International Community**

The international community should take this opportunity to stress to the newly



Destruction of a Palestinian House under the watchful eyes of Israeli Soldiers

elected Prime Minister the primacy of international law, and urge him to stop forthwith any actions that predetermine the final status of occupied Jerusalem.

Settlements and their continued expansion are a violation of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva conventions, which in part stipulates “the occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its civilian population into the territories it occupies”. Settlements have also come under particular condemnation by the United Nations. Resolution 452 adopted on the 29th July 1979 emphasised the necessity of confronting the existing settlements and the need to take measures to safeguard the impartial protection of property seized. United Nations Security Council

resolution 465 adopted on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 1980 calls on Israel to dismantle existing settlements and to cease on an urgent basis the establishment and construction of settlements in the occupied Arab territories, including Jerusalem. United Nations General Assembly resolution 51/223 of the 13<sup>th</sup> March 1997:

Calls upon the Israeli authorities to refrain from all actions or measures, including settlement activities, which alter the facts on the ground pre-empting the final status negotiations and have negative implications for the Middle East Peace Process;

Calls upon Israel, the occupying power, to abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war of 12 August 1949, which is applicable to all territories occupied by Israel since 1967.

As Israel embarks on a possibly new political course in regards to the region, it is imperative the international community holds the new Israeli government to its obligations in regards to international law.

### Notes

- 1 See Ma’aleh Adumim and the Jerusalem Expansion Plan, by Shmuel Groag a paper given at the International Conference on Jerusalem, Utrecht The Netherlands February 1999
- 2 On the El plan see a special report by Jan de Jong, El settlement Expansion Plans, Preempting the growth of Arab Jerusalem, a special report for the Foundation of Middle East Peace winter 1998
- 3 Allison Hodgkins, the Judaization of Jerusalem, PASSIA p.48
- 4 Settlements and the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, An Overview, Institute of Palestine Studies, Geoffrey Aranson p7

## The Palestinian Question and Christian-Muslim Dialogue A

Historical Footnote<sup>1</sup>

Rev Duncan Mac Pherson MA\*

**A**fter centuries of historical conflict,

hatred and misunderstanding the Second Vatican Council (1962 to 65) marked a decisive new approach by the

Roman Catholic Church towards Islam. as well as its limits. Criticisms have been Surprisingly, it was the political question made for what is absent in the of Israel and the Palestinians, which led Council’s treatment of Islam. However the attention of the Council to a new consideration of Islam. This caused it to widen its discussion on the Church’s relations with the Jews so as to include consideration of relations between Christianity and Islam as well as with other major world religions. Examination of the texts of the Council<sup>2</sup> reveals new possibilities for dialogue

such criticisms should not overshadow the Council’s historical importance for Christian-Muslim relations. Indeed, in view of the importance of these texts, it is surprising that the decision to include discussion on Muslims (and Hindus and Buddhists), was something of an afterthought. This afterthought was prompted by a debate over the

relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jews.

The impact of the Israeli-Palestinian question on the Council's debate on Jewish Christian relations shows how cultural and political issues can affect inter-faith relationships. The Council identified what Christians and Muslims believe in common and proposed areas for future dialogue and practical co-operation. Some major theological disagreements were then acknowledged. Problems for dialogue were also recognised in the memories of political and cultural conflicts in history.

However, there was no corresponding acknowledgement that such obstacles are important precisely because of the political and cultural conflicts of our own day. Thus the injustices committed against the

Palestinians in the twentieth century are just one of a number of modern injustices which keep alive in the minds of Muslims today the wrongs perpetrated by the Crusaders nearly a thousand years ago.

### **Vatican II and Christian-Muslim relations: common beliefs**

Vatican II's *The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)* tries to set out a new, positive Christian approach towards other religions.

*Nostra Aetate* begins by professing goodwill and respect towards believers in Islam ("The Church has a high regard for the Muslims"). Next it lists the beliefs, values and traditions which the Church considers to be common to both religions. These include a shared belief in the one God who is Creator, Revealer and Judge. ("They worship God who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, Lord of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. Together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day."). The other relevant document, *Lumen Gentium*, also speaks of shared belief in the Day of Judgment ("they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead").

Other shared values include ethical and

religious practices ("they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting"). *Nostra Aetate* also refers to the key Islamic concept of submission to the will of God, ("They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God").

The common Abrahamic root of both faiths was stressed as were the shared tradition in respect of Jesus [u] and Mary [ra]. It is only after listing what the two faiths

**The impact of the Israeli-Palestinian question on the Council's debate on Jewish Christian relations shows how cultural and political issues can affect inter-faith relationships**

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**Islam, by contrast, has a universally accepted inclusivism, at least towards Jews and Christians, the *ahl al kitaab* (peoples of the book), followers of true prophets of God through whom true scriptures were give by God**

share that *Nostra Aetate* frankly admits that important differences exist over the nature of Jesus [u] Christ. “*Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus [u] as a prophet, his virgin mother they also honour, and even at times devoutly invoke*”. An appeal is then made for a fresh start in relations between the two faiths. “*The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges a sincere effort to be made to achieve mutual understanding and; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.*”

*Lumen Gentium* notes that “*Over the centuries many quarrels and dissension’s have arisen between Christians and Muslims*”. Some of these quarrels were theological and others cultural and political. If theological disagreements were not discussed very fully by the Council that neither was the extent to which historic, political and cultural conflicts were replicated in contemporary political problems such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

**The Limits of Christian Muslim Dialogue**

The Council documents can be criticised both for exaggerating and for minimising what Christianity and Islam have in common. They could have examined shared belief in the mission of Jesus [u] as “the Word of God”

*kalimatabu* (IV,171) and “the Spirit from God” *rubun mind’Llab* (IV 169)<sup>3</sup>.

However, in the view of the notable Arab Catholic scholar, Georges Anawati “it would not have been right...to make use of phrases which are indeed to be found in the Qur’an but could lead to misunderstanding if they are not explained in the Moslem sense”<sup>4</sup> On the other hand some disagreements over Original Sin and the Atonement were ignored despite the fact that they are quite foreign to Islam. “The Qur’an is aware of human disobedience against God ...but ...does not speak about human sinfulness or the need for redemption. Human beings do not fall into sin and become imprisoned in guilt from which they need to be saved. Apart from theocentrism where a redeemer has no place, human beings also do not need a redeemer.”<sup>5</sup>

Other areas of disagreement not referred to in the documents include polygamy and divorce (*talaq*). However the existence such disagreements probably explain the decision to drop a proposed text praising Islamic family values. This text read; “*They (Muslims) strive also, in obedience to God, to lead a moral life as individuals in the family and in society.*”<sup>6</sup> More importantly there was no acknowledgement

that both Christianity and Islam claim ultimate truth. Both religions regard their own truth claims as absolute. Both religions “are exclusive to the extent that they understand Word of God become Book (Qur’an) and the Word of God become flesh (Jesus Christ) as definitive and universally valid”<sup>7</sup>.

Clearly this exclusiveness needs to be qualified in the case of both religions. In common with many other Christians the Council had an inclusivist Christian approach to other religions. According to this approach Christianity represents the most complete version of the truth but other religions can be seen as

containing truth also. However this approach is not accepted by all Christians. Evangelical Christians, in particular often cling to an exclusivist perspective. Islam, by contrast, has a universally accepted inclusivism, at least towards Jews and Christians, the *ahl al kitaab* (peoples of the book), followers of true prophets of God through whom true scriptures were give by God. However for Muslims these Scriptures are no longer available except in a corrupted form.

Muhammad r is *khaatim al anbiyaa* (the seal of the Prophets) and the Qur’an is the only complete and reliable scripture. The Prophethood of Muhammad [r] was not discussed in the Council documents. Indeed Muhammad [r] is not mentioned in either of the relevant documents. Earlier generations of Christians had frequently denounced Muhammad [r] as a false prophet. In some cases slanderous attacks had been

made on his personal character and moral life.<sup>8</sup> Pope Innocent III even identified Muhammad [r] with the Anti Christ prophesied in the Book of Revelation.<sup>9</sup> More recently Christian writers have tried to build bridges to Islam by accepting Muhamad’s prophethood in some limited sense. Thus they have characterised him as a prophet to the pagan Arabs but denying him the status of a universal prophet fulfilling and, where necessary, correcting Christian beliefs.<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately some issues of faith are not resolvable. Catholic Christians believe that the content of public revelation is complete with the coming of Christ and that nothing can be added to it after the death of the last of the twelve apostles. Muslims believe that Muhammad [r] is the last of the prophets completing and correcting the understanding of the earlier religions. Thus, it is no use for Christians to claim that Muslims have an

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incorrect perception of Christian beliefs about the Holy Trinity since this perception derives directly from the words of the prophet Muhammad [r] himself. The only refuge here is to hypothesise that there were in fact Christians in Arabia in the time of the prophet who held a heretical belief in three gods (of which one was the Virgin Mary [ra])<sup>11</sup> If this were the case then the Qur’an could be interpreted not as an attack on Christian doctrine

but upon a deviant version of it.

**The Council and the Politics of the Middle East**

Early on in its deliberations the Council

had discovered that as well as purely theological difficulties there were also political obstacles to better inter-faith relations. The attempt at redefining Christian-Jewish relations had from the beginning been bedeviled by the Arab Israeli conflict. The proposed chapter IV of the schema rejected the idea that the Jews shared a communal guilt for the crucifixion of Christ. The charge of “deicide” was to be specifically rejected, and priests and catechists were warned of the dangers of inciting hatred against the Jews in their preaching and teaching of the Gospel narrative of the Passion of Christ. At a distance in time of only thirteen years after the flight and expulsion of some quarter of a million Palestinians from their homes in 1948, the Arab world universally misread the theological and pastoral intentions of the document. One commentator summarised the Arab response as follows: “if the Council did in fact proclaim the brotherhood of Christians and Jews, such a proclamation might well help the two to live together in peace in the countries of the West, but above all it would rebound to the advantage of the State of Israel”<sup>12</sup> Representatives of Arab Catholic communities in the Middle East were particularly vocal over this question and expressed anxiety over the possibility of a consequent backlash against Christian minorities in Arab Countries. One Arab Catholic leader attributed the progress of the debate to a combination of Jewish propaganda skills and a powerful American lobby motivated by commercial links with Jewish owned business.<sup>13</sup> Arab suspicions about an undisclosed Zionist agenda were further inflamed by the decision of the World Jewish Congress to appoint an official from the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs as its representative in Rome. Unsurprisingly, this was widely viewed as an attempt to gain semi-official Israeli influence at the Council. One Dominican writer expressed the hope

that the new dialogue would eventually lead to the recognition of the State of Israel by the Church. Oesterreicher, himself a Zionist sympathizer, argued that the immoderate attack on the document by the Arab states had “deprived them of the sympathies which they had enjoyed before, and thus the hearts of Christians turn to the forward looking (sic) State of Israel.” Certainly at this point his own sympathies, hidden behind a judiciously balanced academic commentary on the history of the Council debates, suddenly become very clear. The increasing desire “for the recognition of Israel does not amount to a breach of promise but springs from the realization that it is the duty also of the Christians to confirm the sovereignty, freedom, even the mere existence of the country that has given its Jewish citizens a home and has strengthened a healthy self esteem of Jews everywhere.”<sup>14</sup> One leading Bishop, Cardinal Bea, tried to distance the political questions from the theological, “We are here treating a merely religious question, there is no question that the Council will get entangled in those difficult questions regarding the relations the Arab states and the state of Israel, or regarding so-called Zionism”.<sup>15</sup> Pope Paul VI’s 1964 attempted to give practical expression to just such a pastorally motivated and politically even-handed approach. It was on account of these voices of protest that the decision was made to enlarge the declaration to develop the theme of shared elements of religious truth in the major world religions. This approach had already been emphasised in several of the speeches from the early months of Pope Paul VI’s new pontificate in 1963. His first encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (August 1964) centred on the theme of dialogue between the Catholic church and other traditions and belief systems. The Encyclical

envisaged a series of concentric circles. The inner circles consist of non-Catholic Christian traditions. The next circle is that of non Christian monotheism:

*“We refer first briefly to the children of the Hebrew people, worthy of our affection and respect, faithful to the religion of what we call that of the Old Covenant. Then to the adorers of God according to the conception of*

**Arab suspicions about an undisclosed Zionist agenda were further inflamed by the decision of the World Jewish Congress to appoint an official from the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs as its representative in Rome**

**It went on to ask why the Church had regarded the Jews as responsible for the death of Christ for twenty centuries and had then decided to change their minds when Arabs were engaged in a bitter struggle with Jewish aggressors who had invaded Palestine and expelled a million Arabs from their homes to languish in refugee camps?**

**The general view was that the wrongs done to the Jews were being acknowledged but that the injustices still being suffered by the Palestinians were being ignored**

**It is paradoxical that it was “the problem of Israel” which eventually focused the attention of the Second Vatican Council towards Islam**

**Muslims find it difficult to differentiate between Christianity and Western political and military interests.**

*monotheism, the Moslem religion is especially, deserving of our admiration for all that is true and good in their worship of God. And also to the followers of the great Afro-Asiatic religions.”<sup>16</sup>*

The new perspective failed to assuage all the anxieties that had been voiced speedily. A Syrian radio broadcast referred to “a facelift which would fool nobody.”<sup>17</sup> It went on to ask why the Church had regarded the Jews as responsible for the death of Christ for twenty centuries and had then decided to change their minds when Arabs were engaged in a bitter struggle with Jewish aggressors who had invaded

Palestine and expelled a million Arabs from their homes to languish in refugee camps? If the Church had not had the courage to speak out during the Nazi persecution of the Jews why did it choose to speak out at a time when Jews were persecuting Arabs? Jordanian leaders and Arab orthodox Christians expressed equally strong views.<sup>18</sup>

Some Muslim voices counselled a more nuanced approach. One article in the Beirut newspaper *l’Orient* argued that Arabs should welcome the awakening of the Christian conscience to the truth in other religions. “It is a pity that the fear of Zionist exploitation prevents them from examining its contents...Islam is presented as a sister religion. The Christian is exhorted to end all disrespect not only to Jews but to all non-Christians.” In this respect the author considers that Christianity is moving closer to the greater inclusiveness of the Qur’an. These thoughts were echoed by another writer in the same issue of the same newspaper; “now men will be able to live as brothers, and it will be left to God to ask them to justify their faith on the Day of Judgement.”<sup>19</sup>

Such positive responses from the Middle East were, however, the exception. The general view was that the wrongs done to the Jews were being acknowledged but that the injustices still being suffered by the Palestinians were being ignored and, by implication, being condoned. A sympathetic statement on Islam did not take away that suspicion,<sup>20</sup> and the final promulgation of the document at the end of the Council gave some encouragement to commentators sympathetic with Zionism. These commentators seemed to confirm the fears of the Arabs that the next step would be the recognition of Israel by the Vatican.<sup>21</sup> In fact Vatican recognition of the State of Israel did not come until more than thirty years later, when there at least appeared to be a serious prospect of peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and the Palestinians themselves had recognised Israel through their political representatives.

It is paradoxical that it was “the problem of Israel” which eventually

focused the attention of the Second Vatican Council towards Islam. Nevertheless the Israel-Palestine conflict remains a complicating factor in attempts to establish better Christian-Muslim relations. As such it does not stand alone. Political conflicts with Muslim states in the Middle East; civil war in the Balkans, or the Sudan, community violence in Pakistan and Indonesia and the struggle to contain Islamicist terrorism all constitute serious political impediments to greater understanding between Christians and Muslims. Frequently too, Muslims find it difficult to differentiate between Christianity and Western political and military interests. On the Christian side there is a corresponding inability to distinguish between Islam and the political interest groups of either autocratic feudal sheikdoms or of fanatical Islamicist organisations. At the cultural level Muslims may mistake Western consumerist materialism and sexual licence for Christian moral values. Christians, too, may identify opposition to the rights of the individual and hostility to democratic institutions as characteristic of the faith of Islam.<sup>22</sup>

Underlying all these contemporary conflicts and misunderstandings there are the unhappy memories of confrontation and wars between members of the two religions. Such memories probably weigh more heavily upon Muslims than on Western Christians. In the words of one commentator, “on the Western side ecumenical and intellectual progress has made it possible to regard past events with equanimity of spirit, the same does not apply to the Moslem countries. These are still engaged in a struggle against Western pressure, which they all too often equate with ‘Christian’ pressure.

The close linkage between ancient and more recent conflicts in the Muslim psyche is evident in Muslim writers, even among those who are otherwise well disposed to dialogue. “Ever since the Crusades, the relation between Europe and the Muslim world was distorted by the colonialist agenda of the European countries, and after World War I almost all Islamic countries were in the grip of European colonialism. A long struggle ensued that

*secured political independence but colonialism merely took another form neo-colonialism* headed by the United States of America, which does not depend on occupation

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armies but on economic leverage”<sup>23</sup> The wounds of the past are still far from healed and some leading Moslems find it difficult not to remember the ‘aggressions’ of the West at the time of the Crusades as well as at those of ‘colonialism’ and ‘imperialism’. Many concrete situations have to be cleaned up (for the Arab countries especially the problem of Israel and the liberation of some of their peoples) before the conflicts of the past can also be forgotten.”<sup>24</sup>

The now somewhat faded hopes for a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been greeted by the Vatican as “an encouragement towards Muslim-Christian co operation, and indeed to trilateral dialogue and co-operation.”<sup>25</sup> We have seen that the inclusion of Islam on the agenda of the Council debate arose directly from discussions on the Jews and the perceived impact on Middle Eastern politics of any change in the relationship between Catholic Christianity and Judaism. Recent initiatives to set up three-way discussion between Muslims, Jews and Christians represent a recognition that any change in relations between two religions may affect relationships with a third. Thus supportive moves by Christians towards religious Jews must take account of the fact that most, although not all religious Jews are supporters of the State of Israel. So too moves to promote friendship between Christians and Muslims might in turn be misinterpreted as an attempt to isolate the Jews.

The establishment of “The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies” by Crown prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan in 1996 represents one of the most important of several new initiatives “to link the three Abrahamic religions in a network of inter-faith dialogue.”<sup>26</sup> In the United Kingdom the Inter-faith Network includes Islam and Christianity together with all the other major faith communities. In addition a “Three Faiths Forum” has now been

set up to extend the already established framework of Jewish-Christian dialogue to a trilateral conversation which includes Islam.<sup>27</sup>

### Conclusion

Initiatives to promote better understanding between Muslim, Christians and Jews can do nothing but good. It is always valuable to gain insight and sympathy towards the beliefs and values of others. However these initiatives could easily become the preserve of restricted circles of scholars and intellectuals if they become divorced from issues of political justice. If this is true at an international level it is even more the case at the local level. In Palestine today there is a lively dialogue going on between Palestinian Muslims and Palestinian Christians. An equally lively dialogue is going on between Jews and Christians, but the Christian partners are largely European expatriates. Palestinian Christians, like Palestinian Muslims, find it impossible to relate to Judaism at a purely abstract level until there is a measure of justice and peace between Palestinians and Jews at the political level. In the meanwhile a minority of Israeli Jews are engaged in dialogue with Palestinian Christians and Palestinian Muslims. However this dialogue is concerned with issues of peace and justice rather than with inter-faith and it is a dialogue which is inextricably linked with active co-operating at the political level. If this priority of peace and justice as a prerequisite for inter-faith dialogue is true for the followers of the three Abrahamic faiths in Palestine then it is relevant for them elsewhere as well. Alongside the discussion of religious and philosophical issues believers need to confront the political injustices of today which still contribute to a sense of bitterness over events in the distant past. Among such injustices the fate of the Palestinians and the issue of Jerusalem must surely rank among the most important.

### Notes

1 Some of the material in this article is discussed at greater length in *University Lectures in Islamic Studies, Volume 2*. 1998, published by Altajir Word of Islam Trust, 33 Thurloe Place, London SW72HQ

2 A. Flannery *Documents of Vatican II (Dublin: Dwyer 1991)*, page 367 and 739.

3 The Full verse of the Qur’an reads, “O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah, And His Word, which He bestowed on Mary and a Spirit proceeding from Him....” Al Nissa 4-171.

4 Georges Anawati *Excursus on Islam. Volume III of Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II (London and New York: Burns and Oates, 1967)* p.152.

5 *Christian-Muslim dialogue*, by Karl Wolfgang Troeger *Theology Digest* 44:2. Summer 1997. Originally published in German as “Der christlich muslimische Dialog, Theologische Aspekte einer kirchlichen Aufgabe” *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 13 (1996): 214-28.

6 P.153. Georges Anawati

7 Troeger. p.122

8 See pages 100-129 Norman Daniel *Islam and the West* (revised edition) 1993.

9 “A son of perdition has arisen, the false prophet Muhammad, who has seduced many from the truth with wordy enticements and the pleasures of the flesh.

**these initiatives could easily become the preserve of restricted circles of scholars and intellectuals if they become divorced from issues of political justice. If this is true at an international level it is even more the case at the local level**

- Although his treachery has prevailed up to the present day, we nevertheless put our trust in the Lord...that the end of the Beast is approaching whose number, according to the Revelation of Saint John will end in 666 years of which nearly 600 has already passed" Pope Innocent III proclaiming the Fifth Crusade, "Quia Maior" October 1213. L and J. Riley Smith *"The Crusades. Documents of the Middle Ages"* ( London Edward Arnold), 1981
- 10 For example Louis Massignon, the French Catholic orientalist.
- 11 Bishop Riah Abu Al Assal "Christian Continuity in the Holy Land" pg. 9 of *Living Stones Magazine*, January 1998): ' *In an era when a multitude of heresies flourished throughout Christendom, on particular theology spreading through Arabia proclaimed a divine triad rather than a Trinity. The Deity according to this teaching was God the Father, God the Son and God the Mother. Mohammad relates to this in the Qur'an: "God shall say, O Jesu son of Mary, hast thou said unto mankind, take me and my mother as two gods besides God?" (Surah 5:116). Therefore when Mubammad appeared teaching the oneness of God, many Christians embraced Islam ....perhaps, not knowing they were joining a new religion.*' A similar line of thought, more surely historically based, is expressed by an Arab Orthodox Christian, Robert Hadad, who reminds us that "not only were the non-Chalcedonians the greater transmitters to Islam but it may even be argued that Monophysite and Nestorian Christology, the former de-emphasising Christ's human nature and the latter particularly by diminishing his divine nature, have something of a logical conclusion in Qur'anic Christology." In the first case Jesus tends to be "simply God" and in the latter "simply man". Hadad goes on, "It may be telling that the preferred Nestorian description 'Jesus, Son of Mary' rather than 'Son of God' is also the favoured Qur'anic designation for Jesus the Prophet. Islam was no mere bystander in the Christological controversies." "Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam" page 25 of *Orthodox Christians and Muslims*. Ed. N.M. Vapouris 1986 Massachusetts Holy Cross Press)
- 12 John Oesterreicher, Volume III of *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (London and New York: Burns and Oates, 1967) pg. 19
- 13 Patriarch Maximos, the Melkite Patriarch of Antioch. page 164, Xavier Rynne
- 14 Oesterreicher. pg. 133
- 15 Xavier Rynne, page 22
- 16 Printed in English as "The Church in the Modern World", 1965, CTS, London.
- 17 Page 80 of Herder Correspondence, March 1965. 18 Jordanian Members of Parliament, both Muslim and Christian, leaders took the opportunity to engage in anti-Catholic polemic and the Catholic church leaders in Damascus were at pains to point out that the Council had not yet been spoken the last word on the matter. Oesterreicher pg. 104
- 19 New York Times, 26 November, 1964. 20 As the theologian Rene Laurentin observed, there was now a serious danger to Catholics in Arab countries and the Israelis were themselves giving credibility to the more hostile Arab interpretation of the Council's intentions by suggesting that the denial of Jewish responsibility for the death of Christ had a hidden Zionist agenda. Laurentin considered that these Israeli interventions had the opposite effect from what had been intended. R. Laurentin and J. Neusner, "The Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions", *Vatican II Documents* (1966) p.303. 21 One Dominican writer expressed the hope that the new dialogue would eventually lead to the recognition of the State of Israel by the Church. Oesterreicher himself argues that the immoderate attack on the document by the Arab states had "deprived them of the sympathies which they had enjoyed before, and thus the hearts of Christians turn to the forward-looking (sic) State of Israel." Certainly at this point his own sympathies, hidden behind a judiciously balanced academic commentary

on the history of the Council debates, suddenly become very clear. The increasing desire "for the recognition of Israel does not amount to a breach of promise but springs from the realisation that it is the duty also of the Christians to confirm the sovereignty, freedom, even the mere existence of the country that has given its Jewish citizens a home and has strengthened a healthy self esteem of Jews everywhere." Oesterreicher pg. 133

22 Such obstacles are summarised in the 1991 Vatican document *Dialogue and Proclamation* which speaks of "intolerance...aggravated by association with political, economic, racial and ethnic factors" as well as "lack of reciprocity in dialogue which

can lead to frustration" Vatican City, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

23 *Islam and the Others* World Assembly of Muslim Youth. Pages 12-13, Riyadh 114443 Internet 12/11/97.

24 George C. Anawati, 'Excursus on Islam' pg. 154.

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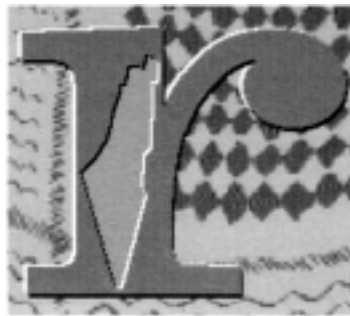
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# Al-Aqsa

## Editor

The Articles published in this journal **do not** necessarily reflect the views of the Editorial Board or of Friends of Al-aqsa

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## The United State, Human Rights, and the Myth of the Honest Broker\*

Nancy Murray Ph.D

fact that the US as broker is acting on behalf of one party and out of its own self-interest. I doubt the US public is even aware of this, since in the US media, words like "honest" and "even handed" are routinely affixed to the term "broker", and the US is invariably depicted as being



The declaration of Principles signed in Washington on September 23rd has, from the Palestinian point of

view, serious flaws that today plague the current negotiations. Israel also has the services of the biggest broker of them all to get it the best possible deal: the USA. Sometimes the world, the region, and even the Palestinian negotiators themselves, appear to have overlooked the

The Capitol: Power House of the United

**Israel also has the services of the biggest broker of them all to get it the best possible deal: the USA. Sometimes the world, the**

State. **L**ast year I bought a house - I did it in a

hurry, without the advice of experts. After I signed on the dotted line, I found there were serious problems with the foundation. But it was a seller's market, and I thought that if I tried to hold out for a better deal or insisted on certain procedures, I would lose out altogether. I was dealing with a real estate broker who professed to have my interests at heart - so much so that I sometimes forgot he was acting for the seller, and that he had a vested interest in getting as high a price as possible for the house. The more I

paid, the more he got to pocket when the sale finally went through, and the happier his client would be.

The analogy between my purchase of a house with a crumbling foundation and the Oslo process is not entirely far-fetched. The Palestinians, entering negotiations for land which they hope will one day constitute a state of their own, have faced a seller's market - in which Israel as occupier has the upper hand.

motivated by its own benign interest in achieving regional peace.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has developed quite a cute

way of describing what the role of "honest broker" means in practice.

When she visited the Ramallah Boys' School in September 1997, after side-stepping the probing questions asked by the students, she asked them to imagine that Israeli and Palestinian leaders were trapeze artists who had to jump and reach for each other in

mid-air. *"What the US tries to do is to help the jumpers to understand the moment. So they can each synchronise their jump and catch each other. If for some reason they don't catch each other, we are the safety net. But the leaders themselves have to be the jumpers..."*

The US as "safety net": What exactly does this mean? If the Palestinians were plunging headlong to their disaster, would the safety net function the same way as it would for the Israelis? Is the security and well-being of Palestinians of equal importance to the security and well-being of Israelis, as far as the honest broker is concerned?

**region, and even the Palestinian negotiators themselves, appear to have overlooked the fact that the US as broker is acting on behalf of one party and out of its own self-interest.**

\* Middle East Justice Network and the Bill of Rights Education Project, USA. Lecture given at the Third International Conference - Health and Human Rights. Arranged by Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, Gaza, Palestine.

the US as the world's leading democracy and champion of human rights, you might find it surprising to find that Americans know very little about human rights. They are largely ignorant about what they are, and why they are so important (I base this statement on work done educating the public about the Bill of Rights - a document which should be familiar to them since, unlike international law, it is constantly invoked in court. However, in the late 1980s a survey revealed that most Americans, when shown portions of the text of the Bill of Rights, thought

80's on behalf of Soviet Jews. But it has studiously overlooked the second part of that same provision, that everyone has the "right to return to his country". The day after the Universal Declaration was passed, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 194 - about the right of return for Palestinian refugees. Resolution 194 had the support of the US in 1948, although the country never worked to enforce it. In December 1993 the US joined Israel in opposing a reaffirmation of Resolution 194. The vote was 127-2.

### The Evolution of the US-Israeli Partnership

Noam Chomsky and Naseer Aruri have written about this subject in considerable detail. They describe how the Israeli-US relationship developed as a strategic response to the perceived need to prevent Soviet expansion and Arab nationalism in a vitally important oil-rich region. Here US policy has been consistent: for the past 50 years it has sought to work through regional surrogates - what Chomsky calls "cops on the beat" - to control the region's oil, to keep the revenues flowing to western financial institutions, and to sell arms.

With the US over stretched in Vietnam since the mid-1960s, the need for reliable partners became more crucial than ever. Israel was an eager volunteer. As a State Department spokesman said in June 1966. "*The US has come to the conclusion that it can no longer respond to every incident around the world, that it must rely on local power, the deterrent of a friendly power as a first line to stave off America's direct involvement. Israel feels that it fits this definition.*"

After Israel's victory in the Six-Day War the following year and the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979, Israel became an increasingly important strategic asset of the US. By 1975 Israel and the US had already signed a Memorandum of Agreement which gave Israel \$2.24 billion annually in weapons and

**Article 13, for example, includes the provision that "everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own" - a statement which the US vigorously promoted throughout the 1970's and 80's on behalf of Soviet Jews. But it has studiously overlooked the second part of that same provision, that everyone has the "right to return to his country"**

I am sure every one knows the answer to these questions. But I am not sure everyone is fully aware of the extent, of the depth, of the US commitment to the security and well-being of only one side. If this is general knowledge, then I don't see why the Palestinians and Arab leaders are so anxious to get the US more involved in the process.

I want to talk about the myth of the honest broker in terms of:

1. The US record on human rights.
2. The evolution of the US-Israeli partnership.
3. The US role in undermining Palestinian rights in the name of "peace"; and
4. Some signs of hope and a proposal for action.

### The United States and the Human Rights

Given the global posture assumed by

US administrations have been happy to keep it that way. They don't want to have to face public scrutiny about the US record of supporting regimes which have been major human rights abusers, or to have to face questions about why the US is the last major democracy to ratify the major human rights covenants agreed to by most of the countries of the world. Finally in 1992 the US Senate ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (minus its two Optional Protocols). It did so in a way that negated several of the Covenant's provisions and said it would not be "self executing" - that is, enforceable in court. Most of the other major human rights documents remain unratified by the US. (Incidentally, in early October a UN special rapporteur visited the US to collect evidence about its use of the death penalty against minors and the mentally retarded, a violation of the one Covenant it did ratify).

The US did sign the non-binding Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was passed by the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948 - its 50th. However, it carefully chooses which parts of the Declaration to invoke and which to overlook. Article 13, for example, includes the provision that "everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own" - a statement which the US vigorously promoted throughout the 1970's and

amount that dwarfs the total given to all of Europe under the Marshall Plan. Today, with the threat of Soviet

expansionism replaced in Washington's eyes by the threat of Islamic fundamentalism, Israel has retained its

guaranteed it the latest military technology. Aid to Israel from 1949 until today totals over \$80 billion, an

strategic value in the eyes of US policy-makers - despite its sidelining during the Gulf War. Listen to these remarks by Rep. Ken Bentson of Texas, made during a debate on the 1998 Appropriations Bill, which took place on September 1997, the day after a suicide bombing in Israel. Bentson was one of many Members of Congress who said Israel must get its entire \$3.1 billion while aid to other countries was being cut. *"Any cuts in foreign aid to Israel now could damage Israel's security, its negotiating posture, and the peace process, as well as the other US interest in the region. Foreign aid to Israel is in the US strategic and economic best interest. Israel is the most reliable ally of the US in the Middle East...Because of the depth of the US-Israeli relationship, and the permanence of the Israel's democracy, the US knows we can depend on Israel in a crisis."*

He continues in this vein for some time, stressing Israel's reliability in an unstable region. As for the "peace process" itself, Naseer Aruri puts it well when he writes, *"The frequently mentioned phrase 'peace process' has been nothing more than a reference to Washington's search for a comprehensive security in the geo-strategic sense of the term."*<sup>1</sup>

Washington today sees its geo-strategic interests in terms of the consolidation of its regional hegemony and the creation of a NAFTA-style free market in the Middle East under the domination of Israel. Washington hopes that Arab elites will find their material interests well-served by this regional economy and will thus be a force for stability.

I do not mean to dismiss out of hand the impact of the lobby and of the various pressure groups which ensure that the American public hears only one side of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. For six years the *Middle East Justice Network*, which I directed

monitored Congress. It was sobering and depressing to see how members of Congress would jump to AIPAC's bidding. AIPAC (the American Israel Political Action Committee) has supplied the Clinton Administration with many of its Middle East strategists and negotiators, as well as its recent Ambassador to Israel (who has just returned to Washington and is expected to be an Assistant Secretary of State). But one must be careful not to confuse the power of AIPAC with that of real power brokers, especially since they have generally been after the same thing. It is easy at present to think that they are interchangeable. But would AIPAC be able to keep the upper hand if the strategic national interests of the US were to substantially change?

AIPAC's role today is fairly confusing, since many Palestinians who are committed to making the Oslo process work think AIPAC is now on their side. After all, it is AIPAC that is trying to convince Congress- and Clinton- to carry on funding the Palestinian Authority by renewing the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act. It is also the mainstream Jewish leaders who have been urging Albright to get tougher on Israel to stop settlement expansion.

According to the September 19 *Washington Post*, *"They have also urged Washington to make it clear to Israel that US has other national interests in the Middle East, such as the flow of oil and stability of friendly Arab governments, which are all being adversely affected by the lack of progress in the Oslo peace process."* One hundred prominent Jews took out a full page advert in the *New York Times* in September asking the US to play a more active role in negotiations. On October 9 Thomas Friedman wrote in the *New York Times* of the *"new mood out there among American Jews"* and cited

a poll commissioned by the Israel Policy Forum and carried out by President Clinton's own Pollsters which found that 84% of U.S. Jews believe that America should 'pressure' both sides to be more constructive, and 75% favoured a "time out" in Israeli settlement activity. The peace process has made strange bedfellows. It seems, then, short-sighted to think that US Administrations have been so relentlessly pro-Israel because of the influence of the American Jews on US policy. It is not even clear how many of the 6 million Jews in America have supported US policy in the Middle East over the years. An informative book called *Jewish power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment*, was recently written by J. J. Goldberg, son of former US Supreme Court Justice. Goldberg maintains that the Jewish organisations which pressure Congress support Israel through thick and thin represent mainly themselves, since most Jews do not share their obsession with Israel. In fact, when the American Jewish Committee carried out a poll asking Jews to rank 14 things that were important to them, "caring about Israel" came out number 12 - the only things lower, or less

**Today, with the threat of Soviet expansionism replaced in Washington's eyes by the threat of Islamic fundamentalism, Israel has retained its strategic value in the eyes of US policy-makers**

**Tens of thousands of Christian evangelicals back the creation of “Greater Israel” in order to bring closer the Second Coming of Christ as promised in the Book of Revelations**

**I believe that the Palestinian cause could**

**have become as compelling to the American public as the anti apartheid cause, if a concerted effort had been made to reach people, along the lines of the outreach done by the ANC**

important, were “practising Jewish ritual” and “dating only Jews”. The pro-Zionist lobby, then, is a small group of influential people, many of whom are major donors to the Democratic Party. They do not have the strength of numbers in Jewish community behind them. They do have considerable Christian support - tens of thousands of Christian evangelicals back the creation of “Greater Israel” in order to bring closer the Second

Coming of Christ as promised in the Book of Revelations. They are bound to become even more fervent in their support as the millennium approaches. Pro Israelis sees them as allies, despite their view as only Jews who in the last days convert to Christianity will finally be saved; the rest will be damned. On October 4, 1996 Netanyahu defended the opening of the tunnel at the Al-Aqsa Mosque before an enthusiastic convention at the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem.

### Undermining Palestinian Rights in the Name of "Peace"

It is my view that if the pro-Israel lobby did not exist, the US government might have to invent it. For the lobby has provided successive administrations with a kind of "domestic cover" for US foreign policy on Israel, much as some Middle East countries served as an "Arab cover" for the US incursions into the Gulf during the build up to the 1991 war.

The US strategic policy calls for its ongoing domination of Middle East resources, and Israel is enlisted toward that end. The lobby silences criticism and intimidates anyone who questions Israel's policies; indeed it helps prevent the full story from being known. The US can pose as an even-handed "honest broker" in the region while the American public remains for the most part ignorant of the responsibility for the frightening military build up in the area, and unaware of Israel's 200 or so nuclear weapons. According to the

Arms Control Association of Washington, the Gulf States have signed contracts worth \$36 billion for the purchase of US arms since the end of the Gulf War - one third of the United States entire arms output, and a greater expenditure than any other region of the world.<sup>2</sup> This is what is going on out of sight, while the peace process has the front of the stage.

Thanks to the intimidation of the lobby, the US does not have to face embarrassing questions about its inaction on human rights abuses perpetrated by Israel and its other Middle East friends, its repeated UN vetoes and defiance of the international consensus on the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

The US government, then, can make policy undisturbed by pro-Palestinian public opinion. But even with the Palestinian side to the story being largely suppressed, indications are that American public has decent enough instincts about the conflict. A poll published in June 1987, before the intifada, indicated that 61% of the US public favoured an exchange of territory for peace. In March 1988, with the intifada bringing disturbing images to the TV screens in the US, a Gallup poll showed that 41% favoured an independent Palestinian State and recognition of the PLO. A *Los Angeles Times* poll showed that 65% thought there was "an element of racism in the attitude of Israelis toward Arabs".

I often wonder what could have been accomplished in the US if the

Palestinian leadership had been as interested in getting its message to the US grassroots as to the drawing rooms of Washington power brokers. From my own direct experience, I believe that the Palestinian cause could have become as compelling to the American public as the anti-apartheid cause, if a concerted effort had been made to reach people, along the lines of the outreach done by the ANC. Such an effort might well have created a climate in which genuine peace-making could take place.

Today, in keeping with the wishes of the lobby, the US is willing to allow Israel to call the shots in the peace process - as long as the process itself is kept going, and the fundamental strategic interests of the US are being met. And why not? After all, there are no principles at stake, as far as the US is concerned. The "process" seems as much a process of undoing the Palestinian rights, of eroding any fixed points along the way, as arriving at a final destination agreed to by the parties. (The destination must remain clothed in mystery, — hence Yossi Beilin, a minister in Yitzak Rabin's Labour Government, was reported in *Ha'aretz* of March 7, 1997 as saying he had never discussed the shape of a final settlement with Rabin, and did not know if Rabin had one in mind).

Through much of the "process" the US has been deliberately low-key and self-effacing to a fault. Thus, we have State Department spokesperson Burns trying not to say anything at all about Israeli settlement

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construction in and around Jerusalem as the bulldozers began to carve out Har Homa, "Our views don't matter. What matters is what the Palestinians and Israeli think."

The US line for public consumption is that it is not up to itself or other countries, and certainly up to the United Nations, to influence the process - it is the Palestinians and Israelis who must leap off the Trapeze.

Meanwhile, throughout the process the US has steadily backtracked on the issue of the Palestinian right to land, which it once called "occupied" but now calls "disputed". Another retreat

took place with the letter Warren Christopher wrote to Israel shortly before he was replaced by Madeleine Albright. In the letter he basically gives Israel carte blanche to interpret UN Security Council resolution 242 any way it sees fit. The rationale is security, "You can be assured that the US' commitment to Israel's security is ironclad and constitutes the fundamental cornerstone of our special relationship. The key element in our approach to peace, including the negotiations and implementation of agreements between Israel and its Arab partners, has always been a recognition of Israel's security requirements. Moreover, a hallmark of US policy remains

*our commitment to work co-operatively to seek to meet the security needs that Israel identifies. Finally, I would like to reiterate our position that Israel is entitled to secure and defensible borders, which should be directly negotiated and agreed with its neighbours."*

Israel, in short, gets to decide what its "secure and defensible borders" are to be, and how much land it is to relinquish, and the US will make sure the peace process delivers on security for Israel. The US, as the honest broker, now appears to see itself in the role of managing "reciprocity", and getting each side to live up to its "commitments". This kind of talk is

easy on ears - but what does it mean in practice? In practice, it means that everything is linked to Israel's security requirements - it does not appear that security is something which Palestinians also need. So Israel can do whatever it needs to do in order to feel secure - throw out Oslo's phased timetable of redeployment, keep the land it wants, enforce closures and other forms of collective punishment. Only if Palestinians do Israel's bidding on security matters - the cost of human rights abuses is immaterial to Israel and the US - only then linkage will kick in, and Israel agree to talk about implementing its commitments. That is a fairly new development - the linkage of security with 'Talking' about implementation: Israel doesn't have to release prisoners, or permit the opening of the safe passage or the port, but simply agree to talk about them for the process to be seen by the US as moving forward.

If anyone has doubts about where the US really stands in the process, and wants to do a reality check on Madeleine Albright's visit - which was applauded as "balanced" and "constructive" by some Arab leaders - you should read in their entirety the lengthy and effusive remarks she made when she visited President Weizman on September 10, from its opening "*we are with you in battle*" to its close, "*Israeli history is characterised by striving for peace, hope for a better future, courage and leadership... Those traits have earned Israel the unbreakable and unending friendship of the people and government of the U.S.*"

So speaks the even-handed arbiter of

### Signs of hope?

These are such difficult times for Palestinians that I feel it crucial that those of us in a position to scan the horizons for signs of hope should do so, we must not just automatically succumb to the fatalistic mindset of "there is no alternative".

So what is out there that might be interpreted as a ray of hope? For one thing, the regional situation does not appear to be entirely static. There is an interesting article in the current *Journal of Palestine Studies* by Robert Olson, who maintains that the US is no longer the sole broker of the peace process, but Europe, through its 27 nation Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Agreement signed in Barcelona in 1995, is getting into the act. This agreement has objectives which, if implemented, would hardly meet with US approval - including making the Mediterranean region a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, and one where people will enjoy the right to self-determination. Meanwhile, there are some signs of cracks in the US regional policy of dual containment of Iraq and Iran and its desire to exert sole hegemony over the Middle East - witness the \$2 billion deal signed between the French company Total and Iran to explore for natural gas, in defiance of the Iran - Libya Sanctions Act passed by the US Congress last year.

Europe and the rest of the world have also shown some backbone in their unwillingness to let the US have sole

say in the conduct of the peace process.  
Madeleine

**throughout the process the US has steadily backtracked on the issue of the Palestinian right to land, which it once called "occupied" but now calls "disputed"**

**"we are with you in battle" to its close, "Israeli history is characterised by striving for peace, hope for a better future, courage and leadership..."**

Albright as US Ambassador to the United Nations had sought to have all the major UN resolutions on the question of Palestine declared redundant in the age of Oslo. The

United Nations responded by passing 19 resolutions on Palestine during its 1996 session: the votes were, typically, 150 in favour, and Israel and the US against, sometimes joined

by Micronesia.

In 1997, the UN has stepped its opposition to Israeli settlement policies and, after US twice vetoed Security Council resolutions and then opposed a General Assembly, the tenth in its history. The April 25 Special Session called for an end to all forms of assistance to Israel's illegal activities in the occupied territories and called on the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure respect of the convention by Israel. The vote was 134-3, with 11 abstentions. A similar resolution was passed on July 16, 1997, this time by 131-3, with 14 Abstentions. At a time when the US is insisting that the UN has no role to play on the question of what happens in the occupied territories, the international community is refusing to go quietly. This could be a positive development.

## FRIENDS OF AL-AQSA

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In terms of the US-Israeli relationship, there is presently a move within Congress, supported by the chair of the House appropriations committee, Republican Bob Livingston, to consider withholding up to \$1.2 billion in Israel's 1998 aid allocation. Unfortunately, this does not mean that Israel's human rights policies have at long last triggered those sections of the US Foreign Assistance Act which bar giving aid to countries that engage in gross abuses of human rights. Instead, Israel is being pressured to allow a 17 year old from Maryland who claims to have joint US and Israeli citizenship to be extradited back to the US to stand trial for murder. It seems, however, that aid to Israel may not, after all, be sacrosanct.

So, as a final note, in Martin Luther King Jr.'s words, "*Peace is not just the absence of war, but the presence of justice.*"

### Notes

1 *The Obstruction of Peace: The US, Israel, and the Palestinians*, p 81.

2 Cited by Alain Gresh in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Summer 1993, p. 73

1. There is a continued threat to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and human rights violation to those worshipping therein.
2. Al-Aqsa is the first Qibla of Islam, is referred to in the Holy Qur'an and its virtues are further substantiated in ahadiths.
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6. Extreme Zionist organisations have openly declared to destroy the Al-Aqsa Mosque.
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## MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE

On 26<sup>th</sup> July 1994 two large car bombs exploded outside the Israeli Embassy and Balfour House in London. In December 1996, two young Palestinians, Jawad Botmeh and Samar Alami, were convicted of conspiring to cause explosion in the UK. The evidence centred around their alleged involvement in those bombings. They were sentenced to 20 years in prison after which they face deportation.

They are both innocent

Samar and Jawad were convicted after a trial at which their defence tore apart practically all of the prosecution evidence, evidence which even the judge acknowledged was “all circumstantial”. But the conspiracy charge they faced was deliberately vague. It allowed the prosecution to use all kinds of weak evidence and innuendo to convince the jury that Samar and Jawad had some involvement in the bombings.

Much of this ‘evidence’ related to their political activities in support of Palestinian human rights. They had between them a mountain of literature on the subject. Amongst all the snide portrayals of legitimate Palestinian political activities, it became irrelevant that there was no actual evidence linking Samar or Jawad with any involvement in those bombings.

They were trapped, probably deliberately, by someone they thought they knew and trusted but who it is now clear was involved in the bombings.

There are suspicions of a cover-up and perhaps of Israeli involvement. A senior MI5 manager believed the Israeli carried out the bombings. An Israeli journalist attempted to pass a phone number to a juror during the trial. And a year after the trial it was leaked that MI5 had received information in warnings before the bombings-but it is still refusing to disclose this evidence.

Indeed, most of the story surrounding these bombings are still unexplained. Large amounts of evidence has been covered up in the ‘public interest’ on security grounds.

Mrs Peirce, Samar and Jawad’s solicitor stated, “I am totally absolutely and one hundred per cent sure, as sure as of any person that I have ever represented, that these two have no involvement whatsoever in the bombing of the Israeli Embassy...At the end of this case I felt feelings that I have not experienced before save in the context of bereavement.”

If you wish to help in any way please contact:

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- ▮ The Co-ordination Forum of the NGO’s Working Among the Palestinian Community in Lebanon and many, many concerned members of the public in Britain.

# Al-Aqsa

Journal Concerned with Issues on Jerusalem

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# Archaeological Excavations in Jerusalem

Raif Y. Nijem\*

## Archaeological Excavations preceding the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967

**A**rchaeological Excavations

started in

Palestine for the first time in the second half of the 19th. Century, but the findings were associated with inaccurate hypothetical assumptions, which were at times contradictory. There were at least 20 excavation sites. The aims and programs of these excavations were obvious to the experts. Wherever a layer of Islamic archaeological findings was discovered it was ignored and ruined while looking for deeper and older layers. Islamic findings were rarely accurately and professionally documented, and the rare few projects documented, were not published, nor widely studied by concerned scientific organisations. The excavations carried out under the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem exceed the total amount of excavations previously in all of Palestine.

The first excavation that took place in Jerusalem was headed by a French archaeologist Desuisi in 1863 AD, who uncovered the Kings Tombs outside the Old City. He claimed that it dated back to the period of King David, and that he found Aramiac

documents. Desuisi promptly transferred these to the Louvre museum in Paris.

From 1867 to 1870 AD. British expedition from the “British Fund to discover the Archaeology of Palestine” headed by Engineer Colonel Charles Warren came to Jerusalem. His main interest was the area of al Aqsa Mosque Haram Shareef. His most important discoveries were Water Wells connected to Gihone Spring, which was the centre of the inhabited area. Then he conducted vertical excavations and horizontal tunnels toward the Eastern, Southern and Western Walls of al Aqsa Mosque Campus, to find out the nature of these walls and the Kind of stone used in building them, which he believed to be Herodian.

From those excavations the tunnel whose entrance falls between Silsilah Gate and the Cotton Market Gate, and is perpendicular to the Western Wall of al Aqsa Mosque Campus, 25 metres long and 6 metres wide, reaches to the Kaitby Sabeel (water fountain). But that tunnel disappointed him. He discovered some antiquities in the hill of Ophel, which went back to the beginning of the Bronze Age. This means that this area was inhabited 5000 years ago. Colonel Warren published the findings in his book “Discovering Jerusalem” in 1871 and in his book “Documenting Jerusalem” in 1884.

Father L.H. Vincent ran excavations near Gihone Spring. He discovered courts and caves engraved in the rock, which contained clay pottery dating back to the Third Century BC. From these findings, Father Vincent concluded, that the South Eastern Hill was the original location of Jerusalem, and that the Gihone Spring played an important role in drawing the settlements and construction to this location.



The Temple: Part of the Model of Herodian Jerusalem in the Gardens of the Holyland Hotel

In later times, more excavations took place, the most important being the ones carried out by the German Architect

**Wherever a layer of Islamic archaeological findings was discovered it was ignored and ruined**

\* Raif Nijem is an archaeologist specialising in Jerusalem. He resides in Amaan, Jordan.

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**She did not  
provide any  
archaeological evidence which  
could lend  
support to the Israeli claim of  
the western area of al Aqsa  
Mosque Haram Shareef**

**All these  
tangible**

**antiquities  
prove that  
Jerusalem was inhabited at least  
5000 years ago, and that the  
Israelis  
existed in it  
for a short  
while**

General Conrade Cheek, who imagined and drew the Temple, which he dreamed to build. In 1975 Professor Benjamin Mazar, the ex president of the Hebrew University, described it as mythical.

The most important discoveries of the General is the canal that starts from below the Manjakiyah School (Now the Moslem Council) and reaches the Roman Rock Water Reservoirs that are in the Zion Sisters Monastery, with 80 metres length, 8 metres height and 1.50 metres. width. The Israeli Department of Antiquities claims that the Canal dated back to 37-152 BC and used to supply Jerusalem and the area of al Aqsa Mosque Campus with

water. During the British Mandate over Palestine, other archaeological institutions were founded, "The American School for Eastern Studies" headed by W. Olbright, then "The British Fund for discovery of Palestine Archaeology" and performed their most important excavations between 1923-1928 AD in the areas adjacent to the Old City of Jerusalem. Later the archaeologists were trying to understand and digest their discoveries, to reach a better understanding about the history of Jerusalem. During the Jordanian sovereignty on Jerusalem 1948-1967, the British Archaeologist Kathleen Kanion headed the "British School of Archaeology" and worked in the Old City of Jerusalem in the year 1961 using modern and scientific archaeological excavation methods. She studied the work done by previous archaeologists, and concentrated her work on the eastern boundary of the Old City. She negated many of the ideas and beliefs of her predecessors in her book published in 1967 "Jerusalem - Excavations 3000 years." She did not provide any archaeological evidence which could lend support to the Israeli claim of the western area of al Aqsa Mosque Haram Shareef.

### Tell al Amarnah Plates:

An Egyptian woman living 190 miles south of Cairo found clay plates in

Tell al Amarnah. These plates were distributed between Berlin, British and Cairo Museum. Most of these plates were letters written by Canaanite Kings to their rulers, the Pharaoh Kings. Similar plates were found in Palestine near Jericho and Nablus. These plates illustrated the way people lived towards the end of the Bronze Age (15th. to 13th.) century BC. Six of these plates were sent by King "Abid Hiba" ruler of Jerusalem to Egypt, and it demonstrated that Abid Hiba represented the Pharaoh's as the ruler of Jerusalem. All these tangible antiquities prove that Jerusalem was inhabited at least 5000 years ago, and that the Israelis existed in it for a short while 3000 years ago, i.e. 2000 years after the Canaanites. Any new archaeological findings by the Israelis cannot change this historical fact.

### The story of the Temple:

The story of the Temple can be deduced from two sources, historical and biblical. The historical story goes that King Solomon built the First Temple around 1000 BC. It was destroyed first by the Babylonian king, Nabucattassar in 586 BC. Then came Herodotus, the Adomite who converted to Judaism, and built the Second Temple in 11 BC. It remained till Titus, the Roman General occupied Jerusalem in 70 AD and destroyed the Temple for the second time. Then came Hadrian, the Roman, and completely removed all the ruins and traces of the Temple in 135 AD, and

declared Jerusalem forbidden to Jews. Jews were bared from Jerusalem until the Muslim Khalif Omar Ibn al Khattab entered Jerusalem in 635 AD and signed the Constitution with Patriarch Safronius who asked him to include a text that said that no Jews will live in Jerusalem, i.e. Jews were to be forbidden to live with Muslims and Christians in Jerusalem. It remained so until some Jews came from Spain and lived in Jerusalem in the sixteenth century. According to the Jewish Encyclopaedia, under the title "Jerusalem", the Jews did not pray in front of the Buraq Wall (The Western Wall) prior to the sixteenth century, but they prayed at the Mount of Olives, i.e. the story of the Temple was not connected to the Western Wall. Jewish interest in this wall started in the twentieth century.

### The Contradiction in the story of the Temple as appeared in the Old Testament

#### (a) The Exodus, Chapter 20 (25-26)

"If you ever build an altar for me out of stones, do not use any tools to chisel the stones, because that would make the altar unfit. And don't build an alter that requires steps; you might expose yourself when you climb up". In this text, The LORD had mentioned to Prophet Moses u some of the altar

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specifications. One of the conditions was not to use chiselled stones in its construction. Chiselling makes the straight sides and right angles to the stone. This means the stones of al Aqsa Mosque's Western Wall, which are rectangle, are unfit for the alter, which is the most important part of the Temple. And as I shall explain later, the material of the Temple was wood and not stone.

#### (b) The Samuel, Chapter 24-2 (18-25).

"That same day the prophet Gad came and told David: Go to the threshing place that belongs to Araunah and build

an altar there for the LORD. So David and his soldiers coming up towards him. He went over to David, bowed down low and said: Your Majesty! Why have you come to see me? David answered: I've come to buy your threshing place. I have to build the LORD an altar here, so this disease will stop killing the people. Araunah said: Take whatever you want and offer your sacrifice. Here are some oxen for the sacrifice. You can use the threshing boards and the wooden yokes for the fire. Take them they are yours! I hope the LORD your God will be pleased with you."

But David answered, "No! I have to pay you what they're worth. I can't offer the LORD my God a sacrifice that I got for nothing." So David bought the threshing place and the oxen for fifty pieces of silver. Then he built an altar for the LORD. He sacrificed animals and burned them on the altar. The LORD answered the prayers of the people, and no one else died from the terrible disease." This text proves that David built his altar on an agricultural land which belonged to Araunah, the Jabusite. It is known historically and archaeologically, that Jerusalem within the boundary

stone walls, never was an agricultural land, but an inhabited site. So this land of Araunah was definitely outside the Old City of Jerusalem.

A question arises? Why Gad was the relation between the LORD and David, while the LORD spoke to David directly many times as stated in the Old Testament chapters. Why did the LORD not ask David directly to build an altar?

Also we notice the contradiction between this above text and what is stated in Chronicles (text 10) chapter 22 -1. That Solomon is the one who built the Temple which included the altar.

*(c) Chronicles The text (2-4) chapter 22 - 1.*  
“David ordered the foreigners living in Israel to come to Jerusalem. Then he assigned some to cut blocks of stone for building the Temple. He got a large supply of iron to make into nails and hinges for doors, and he provided so much bronze that it could not be weighed. He also had cedar logs brought in from the cities of Sidon and Tyre.”

This text confirms that the building material of the Temple was stone and cedar wood. No gold was mentioned among the materials prepared by David, as mentioned in Chronicles chapter 3 - 2.

As in this above text, the chislers prepared blocks of stone. This contradicts with the text in Exodus -25, chapter 20, where it states that using a chisel is not allowed. So why Solomon used stones in the construction of the Temple and the altar?

*(d) Chronicles, The text 1 and 6 from chapter To Continue... 17-1.*

(1) “Soon after David moved into his new palace, he said to Nathan the Prophet, “Look around! I live in a palace made of cedar, but the sacred chest is kept in a tent”.

(6) “I chose special leaders and told them to be like shepherds for my people Israel. But did I ever say anything to even one of them about building a cedar temple for me?”

From these two texts (1) and (6) it is clear that the Temple material was cedar wood. We shall see in the text (1-7), chapter 3- 2 Chronicles, that the

material which Solomon used was palm wood, which neither him nor David had prepared.

**sides and right angles to the stone. This means the stones of al Aqsa Mosque’s Western Wall, which are rectangle, are unfit for the alter**

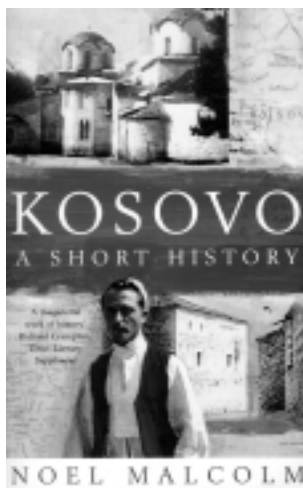
**I can’t offer the LORD my God a sacrifice that I got for nothing. So David bought the threshing place and the oxen for fifty pieces of silver**

**d**

**Chiselling makes the straight**

## KOSOVO: A SHORT HISTORY

by NOEL MALCOLM, Papermac, Macmillan General Books, London, 1998, 492pp. ISBN 0-333-66613-5.  
£10.00



**T**he recent conflict in Kosova is of great interest

to all concerned with liberating Palestine from Zionist-Apartheid regime and reversing the 1948 ethnic cleansing. Parallels abound, especially in the methods of ethnic oppression, as veteran Palestinian activist Ghada Karmi illustrated in a recent article in *Q News* (No. 306, May 1999, p. 17). Milosevic used the 'horseshoe' method of ethnic cleansing, just like the Zionists - surrounding a place on three sides leaving the side nearest the border open, so that refugees fled in that direction. Other parallels include the fact that the Kosovar Albanians, like

the Palestinians, are mainly Muslim people with an influential Christian minority, and as with the Palestinians there has been great solidarity between the confessions against their common oppressor.

Just as Serbs claim that Albania is the 'real' homeland of the Kosovars, Zionists assert the same about Jordan with respect to the Palestinians. Both regard the 'enemy community' as inferior (pp. 268-269). Both claim that those who resist ethnic/sectarian oppression are 'terrorists', both excuse their policies on the grounds that they were historically oppressed, by the Tsars and the Nazis in the case of the Jews, by the Ottomans, Croats, Albanians and the Nazis in the case of the Serbs. Both believe this gives them moral immunity. Most glaringly, Serbs claim that Kosova is their 'Jerusalem' (p. xxxi) - comment is superfluous. Small wonder, as Karmi indicates, that the Zionist regime and Serbia are so friendly; it is interesting that Zionist volunteers fought with the murderous Serb militias in Kosova, and that

Ariel Sharon was outspoken in his attacks on the Albanians. Like the Zionists, Serbia used the 'Islamic fundamentalist threat' to justify its repressive and discriminatory policies in Bosnia, Sandjak and Kosova (pp. 350-351).

Malcolm's book, though academic and well researched, is eminently readable. He is totally fair, debunking both Albanian and Serb mythology that passes for history. The Serb presence in the Balkans dates from the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D., (p. 24), and their expansion into Kosova 'began in earnest only in the late twelfth century' (p. 26). The length of time involved certainly allows the Serbs to claim they are 'native' to Kosova, but so are the Albanians, first mentioned in 1043, fighting for a rebel Byzantine general (p. 28). Malcolm concludes that they were descendants of the ancient Illyrians, including those around Kosova (p. 37).

The 'Battle of Kosovo' in 1389 became a 19<sup>th</sup> century Serb nationalist myth (p. 79), presenting the suicidal murder of Sultan Murat by Serbia's Prince Lazar as a

pious, patriotic choice of a 'heavenly kingdom' over earthly subjection. However, Malcolm indicates that if Murat was indeed assassinated, it was probably by a *Hungarian* knight (p. 72ff). Malcolm shows that whilst later Ottoman government was corrupt and often sectarian, its early years were a decided improvement on the barbaric nature of Serb rule, (p. 94). Later, Albanians as much as Serbs often opposed Ottoman rule, and Albanian Catholics *and* Muslims together with Serbs protested against the tyrannical governor of Pristina in 1822, revealing that 'Muslims as well as Christians suffered under some of the local rulers' (pp. 182-183). Thus, like Zionist *hasbara* against Palestinians, Serb propaganda presenting Albanians as complicit in the sectarian actions of the Ottoman regime because of their Muslim faith lacks credibility.

Further, the Albanian nationalist movement against Turkey, which included Kosovars, consisted of Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox (pp. 220-226), all suffered from Ottoman attempts at suppression. Ironically, there was collaboration between Turkey and the Serbs against Albanian nationalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (pp. 242-244). The consistent Serb treatment of Albanians in their territories from 1804 onwards was violently Islamophobic (pp. 189, 228, 229), involving ethnic cleansing. There was no corresponding Ottoman expulsion of Serbs from Kosova, but many chose to migrate to Serbia after it gained independence, (p. 230 - compare the Arab Jews leaving for Palestine after 1948 - voluntary emigration, rather than ethnic cleansing, apart from Libya after 1969). Interestingly, in the 1890s some

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Kosova Serbs proposed a distinctive *Kosovan* nationalism (p. 231).

The 1913 Serbian conquest of Kosova, effected both by regular soldiers and para-military volunteers was marked by atrocities, recorded by the Vienna correspondent of a Ukrainian newspaper - Leon Trotsky. He stated 'The Serbs... are engaged... in the systematic extermination of the Muslim population' (p. 253). According to the Catholic Archbishop of Skopje, 25,000 Albanians were butchered. Both Catholics and Muslims were forcibly converted to Orthodoxy (pp. 254-255). In Prizren, most mosques were desecrated (p. 258), just as Zionists from 1948 onwards desecrated mosques and churches. Draconian 'security' laws were passed, involving collective punishment and exile (p. 257). Similar to Zionist claims, Serbia justified its conquest on ancient historical accounts of the Serbian Empire's borders (p. 255). Interestingly, Malcolm shows that Kosova never officially became part of Serbia according to its own constitution, nor was it recognised as such in international law: After 1918, it effectively became part of Yugoslavia (p. 264ff). Hence, the detachment of Kosova from Serbia presents no legal problems.

Serb policy would have been impossible without at least the acquiescence of the Great Powers. When Serbia justified its 1913 conquest by reference to the Battle of Kosovo and the ancient Serbian empire - 'Most Western commentators were touched by this historical romanticism... and were also persuaded by the argument that Serbian rule would introduce a higher level of civilization to the region; the latter idea also satisfied many radicals on the European left' (pp. 252-253). Equally, Lloyd George, Balfour and Smuts were excited by the idea of the re-creation of the Biblical Kingdom of Israel, whilst others, influenced by racist-colonial ideas, regarded the European Jewish colonisation of Palestine as a civilising mission - turning 'desert' green, introducing democracy - ideas that are still employed. Moreover, the British Labour Party was largely responsible for the Palestinian catastrophe, through its

1944 resolution calling for the transfer of the Arabs and the expansion of the Zionist state. Just as Jordan and Egypt collaborate with the Zionist regime, similarly pre-war Albania under Zog co-operated with Yugoslavia, who suppressed Kosovar insurgents (p. 287).

Serb policies of systematic colonisation aimed 'to change the national composition of the population of Kosovo' (p. 278), and for this, state land, uncultivated communal land, and confiscated land were handed to Serb colonists (p. 280). The colonies were strategically situated 'along the main communication routes, and ...adjoining Albania' (p. 279), just like West Bank settlements. They were partly funded by American and British pro-Serb charities (p. 281), practices reproduced in Palestine. Just as Russian Jews have been used to colonise the West Bank, Krajina and Bosnian Serbs in the 1990s were settled in Kosova (pp. 352-353).

In some pre-war cases, Albanians were evicted from their homes at short notice, and had only two weeks to appeal (compare what is happening in Silwan, near Jerusalem). By 1935, the rule was that all land was state property 'unless the farmer had a Yugoslav document to prove his ownership - something that had hardly ever been issued to Albanians' (p. 283). Ottoman documents were unrecognised (p. 285). In 1938, the entire Albanian population of 23 villages were dispossessed. A Serbian document explained the aim: 'to make their life impossible, and in that way to force them to emigrate.' (p. 283). Change the names, and it could be Palestine.

The 'transfer' policy beloved by many Zionists also excited Serbs. Some intellectuals urged extreme repressive measures and open religious persecution, including systematic desecration of mosques (pp. 284-285), but the most ambitious was the transfer of 40,000 families to Turkey, agreed with Ankara in 1938, only frustrated by the war (p. 285). Compare Ben Gurion's suggestion in the 1930s that Palestinians should be transferred to Iraq, and contemporary suggestions of resettling refugees in the Gulf states. Serb policies in the 1990s 'were uncannily reminiscent' of those in the 1930s.

The war criminal Arkan falsely claimed that 1.5 million Albanians had migrated from Albania to Kosova over the past fifty years, and were thus just 'tourists' - 'The implication was quite clear.' (p. 352). A Serb petition in 1985 claimed 260,000 immigrants from Albania since 1941. In this respect, Malcolm examining 19<sup>th</sup> century population figures, demonstrates that Kosova had a Muslim majority even then (pp. 194-196). Hence, claims of a massive 20<sup>th</sup> century immigration from Albania are 'pure fantasy', p. 313. Compare the regurgitation of deceitful Zionist propaganda by Joan Peters in *From Time Immemorial* of massive 20<sup>th</sup> century Arab immigration to Palestine.

Zionists have made much of the co-operation between the Mufti of Jerusalem and the Germans (and he encouraged some Albanians and Bosnians to do so), and Serbs have similarly accused the Kosovar Albanians of collaboration. However, just as Zionists conveniently

forget that the Stern gang - one of whose leaders was Yitzhak Shamir - and other Zionists collaborated with the Nazis, so Serbs ignore that some of their own also collaborated (pp. 294, 297-298). Equally, just as Zionists ignore that 9000 Palestinians volunteered for the Allied war effort, so Serbs 'forget' that many Kosovar Albanians resisted the Axis, pp. 296, 306-307. At any rate, Palestinian and Kosovar co-operation with the Axis had less to do with ideological sympathy than with the fact that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend' - Albanians, like some Palestinians, saw it as a chance to reverse the colonising policies of the previous two decades (p. 296). Both Albanians and Palestinians were victimised by vicious, racist-colonialism, in the latter case with the connivance of Britain; no wonder that some could see little difference between their oppressors and the Axis.

The Tito years, especially after 1966 (p. 324) saw improvements in the condition of Albanians, but

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correspondingly, their empowerment and progress aroused Serb (p. 329), and ironically, false propaganda of massacres and rapes abounded (pp. 338-340). Tito's death let the nationalist genie out of the bottle, and Kosova Serb agitation eventually caused the rise of Slobodan Milosevic (p. 341ff). Everyone is familiar with the events of the last ten years, but we need only note the discriminatory measures against Albanians who were still Yugoslav citizens and compare it with that against 'Israeli Arabs'.

One plan for Kosova imposed in 1990 resembles the infamous 'Koenig memorandum' to the Israeli Government in 1976 and actual state practices: creating new municipalities for Serbs, concentrating investment in Serb-majority areas, building houses for Serbs returning to Kosova, encouraging Albanians to seek work outside Kosova, family planning for Albanians, retrospectively annulling property sales by Serbs to Albanians. In 1989 Albanians were forbidden to buy or sell property without state permission. Palestinians - including Israeli Arabs - will be familiar with such policies, including the renaming of Albanian places in the Serbian language and with Serb cultural symbols, p. 352, just as occurred in Palestine - compare Jebel Abu Ghneim - 'Har Homa', and in one particularly sickening recent case, renaming a street in Jerusalem after Dhu Nuwas, the notorious 6<sup>th</sup> century Jewish King of Yemen responsible for anti-Christian pogroms.

NATO's liberation of Kosova presents a devastating blow to Zionist propaganda, which always asserted that refugees should be resettled *away* from their homeland. The Kosovars are going home, even though their houses and villages have been destroyed, disproving the 'once a refugee, always a refugee' notion. Both Clinton and Blair have stated that *this* - and the prevention of racial/sectarian oppression - was the intention of the war. Friends of Palestine should note how this changes U.S./U.K. policy earlier in the century, so we must not think that current policy on Palestine is

irrevocable. Zionist propaganda always argued that there had never been an independent Palestinian state; the same was true of Kosova, yet NATO's action will inexorably lead to independence.

Two precedents have been established; that it is legitimate to 'attack' a sovereign state engaged in racial/sectarian oppression, especially to reverse ethnic cleansing, so Zionist propaganda about 'Arab aggression' in 1967, etc., is now redundant; secondly, that ethnic cleansing need not be permanent. We can now argue that *this* is the parallel that *should* be applied to Palestine. The question is whether Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities in the West will be active in lobbying MPs, Governments, etc., to demand this. Familiarising oneself with this excellent book would be a step in that process.

London Anthony McRoy

## Christians and Jews Under Islam

by. YOUSSEF COURBAGE AND PHILIPPE FARGUES, translated by Judy Mabro, I. B. Tauris, 1998, 242pp. ISBN 1- 86064- 285- 3



Anyone with interest in the Middle East will be

familiar with the shrug of the shoulders, the shake of the head and mutterings of “religion is the cause of all trouble in the world” that greet attempts to discuss the situation in the region in a rational way. A cursory look through this book might persuade even fervent believers that this is indeed the case. The complexity of the religious demography of the area - what the authors misleadingly call “Islam” - is staggering, and it is easy to see how sceptics might conclude that religion is the root of all that is wrong in the world. This is especially true in hot spots like Palestine, or Lebanon, the chapters on which provide some of the most interesting reading in this book.

Containing many tables of statistics, parts of the related text are as dry as academics can make it, but this is not a dull book. The authors dispel more than a few

myths, notably the old chestnut that Islam was spread by the sword. In a sentence which should be read and internalised by all Muslims whose backgrounds (and hearts?) lie in countries other than those in which the majority have chosen freely to reside, the authors point to the almost unique nature of the Islamic conquest of vast tracts of the then known world. “...the weakness of their demographic base proved to be a source of strength for the Arab-Muslim armies since, in order to impose the power of Islam on much larger populations, they were obliged to rely on the support of the local people and had necessarily to come to terms with ideas and cultures that were different to their own.”<sup>1</sup>

This is an important suggestion, given the Qur’anic verse, “Unto you your deen, and unto me mine.”<sup>2</sup> It is an illustration of how the early Muslims were able to maintain their deen, attract and convert others to the faith *and* accommodate followers of other faiths with such stunning success. The lesson is there for their present day

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successors to learn from and put into practice (after all, what is history for, if not show us the success and failure of past human endeavours so that we don’t make the same mistakes?).

I would take the authors to task for the title of their book, as it is at best misleading to equate the Arab world with Islam, particularly in the modern era. Given the avowedly secular nature of Ba’ath Iraq and Syria, the Christian-domination of Lebanon and Zionist-occupied Palestine, the chapters of the book dealing with recent decades demonstrate the inaccuracy of the title. That quibble aside, the inter-religious tensions now existing in various Arab countries and the rabidly anti-Islamic Turkish state (imposing secularism on its predominantly Muslim citizens) will be viewed in a new light after reading this book. It is clear that there are few if any easy answers to complex problems; it is also true that history certainly does have a habit of repeating itself. The British, we are told, encouraged minorities to rise up against the local rulers in the middle of the nineteenth century,<sup>3</sup> a scenario repeated less than eighty years later under the leadership of a certain Colonel T. E. Lawrence. The rest, as they say, is history... and the consequences are with us to this day.

The struggle for the land of Palestine - given a religious context by secular Zionism’s wolf in Judaic sheep’s clothing - is largely explained by the authors in demographic terms, the factor around which the struggle revolves. Indeed, “beyond a belief in one God, the Israelis and Palestinian adversaries found themselves in agreement on only one point; they both recognised the demographic dimension of their conflict.” Ignoring the fact that surveys reveal that most Israelis consider themselves to be “secular Jews”, the authors are otherwise right. The need to remain a majority in the Zionist state has seen Jewish politicians, so-called hawks

and doves alike, advocate higher Jewish birth rates, increased immigration (just Jews, of course) and even the late unlamented Rabbi Kahane’s call for the mass expulsion of Palestinians from their own land.

The example of the modern state of Israel stands in stark contrast to the tolerance of historical Islam detailed in this book. Of course, there have been a few lapses - the authors cite among others “the Mamluks’ [intolerance]

in religious matters”,<sup>4</sup> - apart from which Islam has provided an exemplary case to follow.

The Ottomans were noted generally for their wish to rule over a multi-religious empire. Sultan Selim I, for example, ordered that the Christian city of Aleppo be repopulated with Christians, so shocked was he by their dwindling numbers.<sup>5</sup> It is a touch ironic, therefore, that the western allies’ destruction of the Ottoman Caliphate led to the creation of what became one of only two states whose official policy was one of *apartheid*. World pressure demanded and won an end to the South African experiment in racist politics, but the Zionist version continues. It is strange, therefore, that Muslims seeking to revive the model Islamic state are branded as “fundamentalists” and “terrorists”, while the Zionist state that exists because of racial and religious intolerance - and depended on anti-Semitism for its creation - is feted the world over.

The consequences of the destruction of the Caliphate and the creation of Israel are detailed in chapter 7; if you read only part of this book, make it this chapter. Be warned, though. A partial reading will result in a partial understanding of the situation the authors set out to explain, and your understanding of today’s Middle East will be lacking. Since limited understanding and awareness of the injustices that occur daily in Middle Eastern countries (Zionist and non-Zionist alike) under

the gaze of the world's media is one reason why they continue unchecked, this is a dangerous situation. The authors have provided us with a window into the past that enables us to view the present and engage the future, insha'Allah. It's not an easy book to read, but give it a try. Cut through the statistics and dry text, and you're left with a valuable addition to your reference library.

- 1 Page 1.
- 2 Al-Qur'an, chapter 109, verse 6.
- 3 Page 70.
- 4 Page 13.
- 5 Page 62.

Leicester **Ibrahim Hewitt**

## Notes

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