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Opinion |

The Palestinians Won the 2017 Battle for Temple Mount.

That’s Good for Israel, Palestinians - and many Israelis - regard their victory in Jerusalem as Israel's capitulation. This is why that's a rare win for peace, and for Israel

Palestinian Muslims wave a national flag and flash the victory sign in front of the Dome of the Rock in the Haram al-Sharif compound, or Temple Mount, in the old city of Jerusalem. July 27, 2017

My day job is as a Professor of Israel Studies at the University of Maryland; every fall I teach a large course entitled “Fundamental Questions of the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict.” A few years ago I was lecturing about the 1973 Yom Kippur War and explained that, as I see it, the war was essentially as a draw, in which Egypt and Israel both lost and won.

Temple Mount crisis shows that right-wing bluster is ultimately followed by capitulation
Palestinians in Jerusalem got a taste of victory on Temple Mount, and they're hungry for more
Israeli decision makers once again ignored the warnings of bloodshed

With Jerusalem burning, President Trump needs to engage

After class, an Egyptian student came up to me and, very respectfully and politely, informed me that I was wrong, that Egypt unquestionably won that war.

I use that incident (which didn’t surprise me; I also know that many Israelis are equally convinced Israel won that war) as a template for understanding Israel’s retreat (or capitulation) with regard to the metal detectors it was installing at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif compound in response to the brutal killing of two Israeli policemen.

Israelis largely regarded it as an appropriate technical response to the incident and most were taken aback at the widespread fury among Palestinians and Muslims worldwide. They regarded the anger as purely political and even hypocritical (apparently mosques in Mecca and Medina already have metal detectors and security cameras). Doubtless, last Friday’s announcement that they have been removed was seen by many as a humiliating defeat, a capitulation to threats and violence for which Israel will have to pay heavily.

On the contrary. It may be a humiliation for the Prime Minister, but it is a clear (if rare) victory for peace, which is a victory for Israel.

Unfortunately, it is unlikely that Netanyahu’s government will follow it up with anything constructive. Rather, as we see in the ostentatiously public welcome for the security guard at the Israeli embassy in Jordan who killed an attacker and which deeply angered Jordan’s King Abdullah, Bibi feels he must make up ground "lost" to Israel’s foes and, also, at least as important, placate Israel’s right wing. Otherwise, Israel will be seen as "weak."

What this really shows (once again) is that Israelis have not yet absorbed the lesson of its two successful peace processes, with Egypt and Jordan, nor of its much longer list of unsuccessful ones.

It is common wisdom that it was the perception of the Yom Kippur War as a victory by Anwar Sadat that allowed him the political leeway to make peace with Israel in 1977. Similarly, though much less dramatically and not at all surprisingly, Israel's beginning the Oslo Process and recognizing the PLO in 1993 allowed Jordan's King Hussein (although initially blindsided) to sign a peace treaty with Israel the next year.

Open gallery view

Israel has always assumed that driving its adversaries faces into the dirt, i.e., humiliating them, is an essential part of convincing them they could not win, and that Israel is here to stay.

This strategy has never worked; to the extent peace has been maintained it has been in spite of the humiliation rather than because of it.

Currently, the two most important examples of this sort of thinking are the demand that Palestinians recognize Israel as the "Jewish state," and the pointless attempts to bypass the Palestinians and make peace with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, both of which would require Palestinians, in the first instance, and major Arab leaders in the second, to swallow humiliation, as they perceive it, that might seriously jeopardize their rule. They would be despised by their people, whether Israelis understand it or not.

This has everything to do with the recent situation on the Temple Mount.

Let's assume for the moment that although the Shin Bet warned the government that metal detectors were a very bad idea, the actual decision-makers could genuinely not understand why they might create riots and potential jihad.

It goes to show that after a hundred plus years of fighting, Israelis have still not learned to see things from the adversary's point of view. Anyone who has even a passing familiarity with the incidents of the past three years should recognize that that would be seen as a deliberate statement of ownership by Israel, whether that was intentional or not.

However, the fact that the Palestinians won this one, for a change, is good in itself.

For Israel as well, which, at least since 1967, has had no need to prove itself anymore. It's there – and by now many Arab leaders even appreciate it as a status quo power and a bulwark against Iran. But for that to be openly recognized, Palestinians need to retain some pride, along with the 22% minus of Palestine that is the most they would get in any future peace deal. There are no doubt Palestinians who will trumpet this as the first step in a successful war of liberation but that is empty rhetoric, not reality.

The fact is that if Israel's leaders really want peace, as they proclaim, then they must allow Palestinians dignity instead of dishonor. That should be obvious. It is very hard to believe protestations of peaceful intent when accompanied by continual humiliation. Thus, this Israeli "defeat" is actually a victory that shouldn't, but probably will, be squandered.

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How one of Jerusalem's holiest sites became the center of a deadly crisis

The crisis at the Temple Mount continued over the weekend. A fragile resolution was reached late Monday evening.

By Sarah Wildman **Jul 25, 2017**, 1:30pm EDT

Clashes Break Out During Noon Prayer Outside Al Aqsa Mosque In Jerusalem

A fight over a holy patch of ground in the center of the Old City of Jerusalem has triggered violence, political chaos, and religious strife. And now, despite a fragile truce, the situation still threatens to spiral further out of control.

The dispute began July 14 when a pair of Israeli police officers were shot and killed near the al-Aqsa Mosque, in the area known as the Temple Mount or Haram al-Sharif, one of the holiest places in the world for both Muslims and Jews. In response, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu temporarily shut down all access to the site and installed metal detectors that anyone hoping to pray there would need to pass through. (Only Muslims are permitted to pray on the Temple Mount, by law, though non-Muslims may visit.)

The problem is that Israel made the moves without consulting the Muslim authorities who control access to the site, sparking protests and deadly violence across the region. The Waqf, the Muslim custodians of the site, called for Muslims to pray outside of the metal detectors — and essentially boycott prayer on the Temple Mount — until the dispute was resolved.

On Monday, late in the evening Jerusalem time, Netanyahu's government finally agreed to remove the metal detectors and find a different type of security measure.

It may have been too late, with the fight over access to the Temple Mount now spreading to both Jordan and Turkey, two of Israel's closest allies in the Muslim world. The latest blow came Tuesday, when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused Israel of trying to take control of the Temple Mount and upend the status quo.

"Everyone who knows Israel is aware that restrictions on al-Aqsa mosque are not due to safety concerns," he said, speaking to parliamentarians in Ankara.

Erdogan added a call for all Muslims to head to Jerusalem.

"Come, let's all protect Jerusalem," he also said.

The Muslim custodians of the site also expressed dismay at the Israeli government's compromise proposal of a separate but still technological security measure. They called for Muslims to continue to boycott the site until they had a chance to assess the new recommendations.

Netanyahu's metal detectors, in other words, had touched the third rail of Israeli politics: the very fragile 50-year-old status quo agreement that gives authorities from each of the world's three monotheistic religions control over Jerusalem's holy spaces.

Here's how we got so close to the precipice, and why the situation is still not entirely under control.

Violence triggered more violence. Then things got even worse.

Anger swept the Muslim world after Israel installed the metal detectors, with protests extending all the way to Ankara and Amman.

In East Jerusalem and the West Bank, the tensions turned into actual bloodshed. On Friday, three Palestinians, including two teenagers, were reported shot dead during massive protests. At least 200 more were wounded across the region.

Also on Friday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announced he was breaking off all diplomatic relations with Israel — including crucial conversations on security coordination — in protest over the new security measures on the Temple Mount.

Israel also paid a heavy human price. Friday night, three Israelis — including a 36-year-old father of five — were stabbed to death in their home as they sat down to a Sabbath meal. The Israeli army released photos of a room drenched in blood. Thousands attended their funeral on Sunday.

In a Facebook post shared widely in the Israeli press, the assailant, 19-year-old Omar al-Abed, wrote, "I am young, not even 20 years old. I had many dreams and aspirations. But what life is this in which our women and our young are murdered without any justification? They are desecrating the Aqsa Mosque and we are sleeping." Abed was shot and apprehended after the terror attack.

The violence soon spread to neighboring Jordan, where on Sunday a handyman attacked an Israeli security guard at a residence on the Israeli embassy compound in the capital of Amman. The guard shot and killed both his would-be assailant and a bystander.

While it wasn't immediately clear if the attacker acted because of the Temple Mount controversy, the incident came in the wake of widespread protests in Amman over the crisis. In the immediate aftermath of the incident, it wasn't clear if the Jordanians would let the guard out of the country. Israel, for its part, refused to turn over the guard, claiming diplomatic immunity.

By Monday morning, diplomats were zigzagging their way across the Middle East, trying to find a way to defuse the escalating tensions. Jason Greenblatt, the Trump administration's special envoy for the Middle East, arrived in Israel Monday morning and was set to also visit Amman. Israel sent its own envoy to Jordan to smooth things over with the Hashemite Kingdom's government.

Netanyahu, for his part, spoke by phone with Jordanian King Abdullah. The king underscored the importance of removing the metal detectors.

“The king stressed that a quick solution should be found and to dismantle what caused the ongoing Temple Mount crisis, restoring the situation that existed before the crisis' outbreak and to fully reopen the al-Aqsa Mosque,” read a statement from the Jordanian leadership, according to a report in the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz. “The king added that an agreement should be reached on arrangements that will prevent a recurrence of such escalations in the future while respecting the status quo of the Temple Mount.”

In the end, Netanyahu's security cabinet recommended the removal of the metal detectors, and Jordan agreed to send home embassy officials — who had been trapped on embassy grounds for 24 hours — rather than detain them.

Netanyahu's critics say the prime minister should have known any moves near the Temple Mount could quickly lead to protests or actual violence.

“Bottom line is that Bibi [Netanyahu] had plenty of warning from his own security people that this wasn't simply a security matter,” says Lara Friedman, the president of the Foundation for Middle East Peace.

Metal detectors at the Temple Mount became about more than security
The metal detectors at the center of the current controversy were installed last week to screen would-be worshipers trying to ascend to the al-Aqsa Mosque plaza for prayer.

As I explained on Friday, practical day-to-day control of, and access to, the specific holy sites of Jerusalem rests in the hands of each faith's own religious authorities. That means that when the Israeli government unilaterally imposes new security measures — even things like metal detectors that might seem relatively minor — it can spark widespread resentment and anger.

Criticism didn't just come from the Palestinians. On July 19, less than a week after the metal detectors were installed, officials from the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic security organization, and the Israeli military pressed for their removal. Over the weekend, high-level Israeli police officers, speaking anonymously, told the Israeli daily Ha'aretz that the move to install metal detectors was "careless." The newspaper noted police leaders had not been properly consulted in advance.

A seemingly minor security question had, as a result, become a referendum on access to holy sites in Jerusalem specifically and Israeli control of the city more generally.

"Threats, real or perceived, to sacred space are what sets the region aflame," Friedman says.

The current controversy doesn't seem likely to escalate into a broader conflagration, but the underlying issues remain just as explosive — and just as unresolved. That means a new round of violence may just be a matter of time.

Jordanians march in Amman following Friday prayers on July 21 to protest new Israeli security measures at Jerusalem's holy site, known to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary and to Jews as the Temple Mount. Khalil Mazraawi / AFP - Getty Images

July 24, 2017, 7:02 AM CDT / Updated July 24, 2017, 7:12 AM CDT

By Paul Goldman and Saphora Smith

TEL AVIV, Israel — An Israeli embassy security guard fatally shot two Jordanians in Amman Sunday after one reportedly attacked him with a screwdriver — prompting concerns that the Temple Mount security crisis might exacerbate tensions between the neighboring states.

Israeli media said Jordan had demanded to conduct an investigation and had prevented the Israeli security guard from leaving the country. Israel's Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying that the security guard had diplomatic immunity and that it was working with Jordanian authorities.

Jordan's Interior Ministry declined to comment and NBC News could not immediately reach Jordan's Ministry of Information spokesperson.

The incident appeared to be a sign that violence linked to Israel's placement of metal detectors at the entrances to the Al Asqa mosque in Jerusalem could spread to neighboring Jordan and possibly spark a diplomatic crisis.

Thousands of Jordanians took to the streets Friday to protest against Israeli policies at the shrine, known to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary and to Jews as the Temple Mount. Jordan manages the ceremonial and religious aspects of the sacred complex.

Danny Yatom, a former head of Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, told NBC News that one solution to the crisis would be for Jordan to hand over the Israeli security guard in return for Israel's removal of the metal detectors from the gates of Al Asqa.

"I think we have to look now at the broader picture and take into account what happened in Jordan and what is going on Temple mount and to combine those two problems," he said.

Yatom suggested "a package deal" should be reached following discussions between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Jordan's King Abdullah.

Netanyahu said in a statement Monday that the Jordanian Ambassador to Israel had held talks with the Israeli Foreign Ministry and had been asked to help resolve the situation.

Oded Eran, a former Israeli Ambassador to Jordan, told journalists that in the short term security should be stepped up outside the embassy and in the long term Jordan should "tone down their statements on Jerusalem and events at Temple Mount."

Eran said that while behind the scenes there was good cooperation between Israel and Jordan on security and access to water but added that "on the public level there is too much tension and unnecessary noises coming from the Jordanian government."

He added: "Jordanians need to calm the situation in Amman."

There are few confirmed details of the incident in the Israeli embassy in Amman, which appears to have happened in a building used as a residency for staff in the embassy compound.

According to a spokesperson for Israel's Foreign Ministry the security guard had escorted two Jordanian workers into the building to replace furniture. The building's landlord was also present, the spokesperson said.

At one point one of the Jordanian workers attacked the security guard from behind and began stabbing him with a screwdriver, the spokesperson said.

The security guard fought back, fatally shooting the worker and accidentally injuring the building's landlord in the crossfire, according to the Associated Press. The landlord later died of his injuries, Israel's Foreign Ministry spokesperson said.

The Israeli security guard was also injured in the attack. In a statement to the Jordanian state news agency, Jordan's Public Security Directorate confirmed two Jordanian citizens had died in the shooting but added that the investigation was ongoing.

The embassy has long been a focus of anti-Israeli protests during times of Israeli-Palestinian friction, according to Reuters.

The incident came after more than a week of bloodshed in Jerusalem as tensions gave way to violence over the Holy Land's most contested shrine.

The tensions erupted after Israel installed metal detectors at the gates in response to a shooting attack at the site that killed two Israeli policemen.

Muslim religious leaders claim Israel is trying to expand its control at the site under the guise of security, a claim Israel denies. The tensions have led to mass prayer protests and Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Three Palestinians died in clashes in Jerusalem and three Israelis were killed in a stabbing attack in a West Bank settlement on Friday evening.

On Monday a Palestinian reportedly stabbed an Israeli man in the town of Petah Tikva, according to police. The 40-year-old was described as being in a moderate to severe condition, it was unclear if his injuries were life-threatening.

Netanyahu said in his statement Monday that the cabinet would reconvene following its emergency session on Sunday to "ensure security and quiet on the Temple Mount, in the Old City and in Jerusalem as a whole."

It came as Israeli media reported that U.S. President Donald Trump's Mideast envoy was on his way to the region to try to defuse the growing Temple Mount crisis.

The newspaper Haaretz reported that U.S. Mideast envoy Jason Greenblatt was due to arrive in Israel Monday in the Trump administration's first foray into the crisis.

Paul Goldman reported from Tel Aviv, Saphora Smith reported from London and Charlene Gubash reported from Beirut.

2017 Temple Mount crisis
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Part of Israeli–Palestinian conflict

Location Jerusalem

Cause 2017 Temple Mount shooting

Outcome

Further Temple Mount entry restrictions

113 wounded in police clashes

11 deaths

The 2017 Temple Mount crisis was a period of violent tensions related to the Temple Mount, which began on **14 July** 2017, after a shooting incident in the complex in which Palestinian gunmen killed two Israeli police officers. Following the attack, Israeli authorities installed metal detectors at the entrance to the Mount in a step that caused large Palestinian protests and was severely criticized by Palestinian leaders, the Arab League, and other Muslim leaders, on the basis that it constituted a change in the "status quo" of the Temple Mount entry restrictions.

The Jerusalem Islamic Waqf called Muslims to pray outside the Temple Mount, and not enter the mosque complex until the metal detectors were removed.

On **25 July** the Israeli Cabinet voted to remove the metal detectors and replace them with other surveillance measures. Nevertheless, Palestinian activists decided to continue protesting, claiming those cameras represent a greater degree of control than the metal detectors. On **27 July**, Israel removed the new security measures from the Mount, which led to the Waqf telling Muslims they could return to pray inside the compound. 113 Palestinians were reportedly injured in clashes with police after thousands of Muslims returned to pray at Temple Mount.

Within an 11-day period, eleven people had died due to the crisis.

Temple Mount shooting

Main article: 2017 Temple Mount shooting

Shortly after 07:00 in the morning on **14 July** 2017, three gunmen, armed with rifles and a handgun, left the Temple Mount and approached a police checkpoint in the Lions' Gate outside of it in East Jerusalem where they opened fire on officers of Israeli Border Police. Two Israeli border police officers were critically wounded and died later, and another two were moderately wounded in the attack. The three attackers fled back to the square in front of one of the mosques on the temple mount and were shot by Israeli police officers.

Aftermath

Israeli authorities shut down the Temple Mount complex, and for the first time in years, Friday prayers at the al-Aqsa mosque were canceled. The old city was also closed to traffic. The al-Aqsa mosque was raided by Israeli authorities and Jerusalem Islamic Waqf personnel were questioned. The Israeli police said they found additional weapons in the raid, including mock guns, knives, clubs, chains, and other weapons.

Disturbances on the Temple Mount

Metal detectors at the Temple Mount

On the **16 July**, Israeli authorities reopened the Temple Mount, after placing metal detectors at the entrances to the compound. The Waqf called on Muslims to protest outside of the compound instead of entering, with around 200 Muslims protesting outside on the **16th**. Israeli authorities also announced the installation of security cameras outside the compound. On **21 July**, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas ordered the suspension of all official contact with Israel until it removed the new security measures.

Thousands of young Palestinians clashed with Israeli security services in protest of the new security measures put in place at the al-Aqsa mosque. On Friday, **July 21** three Palestinians were killed in clashes with Israeli forces in Jerusalem's Old City, Palestinian officials said.

Following a ruling by the supreme court on the **25 of July**, the attackers' bodies were released to their families on the night of the **26 July**. In a show of support for the attackers, some 10,000 people marched in the funeral procession in Umm al-Fahm, praising the attack and calling the attackers heroes and shahids. Even though Umm al-Fahm is located inside Israel, (they are Israeli citizens) they still praised the terrorists during the funeral. But not all are radicalized. One relative said, "We did not want to talk too much about what happened, and we did not know at all that they were planning to shoot policemen in Jerusalem. If we had known, we would have stopped them."

The Islamic Waqf along with the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem announced on the morning of **27 July** that Muslims can return to worship at the al-Aqsa compound after Israel completely removed the newly installed security measures. Following the victory celebrations that lasted all Thursday afternoon, thousands of Muslims entered the Temple Mount. Almost immediately after worshippers returned to the site, clashes broke out between worshippers and Israeli security forces with worshippers throwing rocks and security forces using tear gas and stun grenades. 113 worshippers were injured and one Israeli police officer injured.

28 July, Amid high security in the Old City of Jerusalem, thousands of Muslim worshippers attended Friday prayers at the Temple Mount. Crowds dispersed peacefully from the compound, because the entrance to prayer-goers was limited to men aged 50 and older and all women.

Halamish attack

Main article: 2017 Halamish stabbing attack

On **21 July** 2017, a 19-years old Omar Al-Abed al-Jalil broke into a Jewish house in the Israeli settlement of Halamish. He stabbed four people in the house, killing three of them. Before the attack he wrote in his Facebook account: "Take your weapons and resist.... I only have a knife and it will answer the call of Al-Aqsa.... I know I am going and will not return."

Petah Tikva attack

On **24 July** 2017, an Arab Israeli civilian was stabbed in Petah Tikva, Israel, by a Palestinian man from Qalqilya. The incident is suspected as an act of terrorism.

Attack

The attacker, a Palestinian resident of Qalqilya, stabbed a bus driver near a Shawarma stand in the Israeli city of Petah Tikva, after he had entered to the shop. The assailant was arrested and taken for questioning by the Israeli police. The victim, a 32-years-old Arab-Israeli man, resident of the Arab village of Arraba, was in moderate-to-serious condition from stab wounds in his neck, and was taken to Beilinson Hospital.

The attack has been described by authorities as a terror attack, with the victim being attacked due to the attacker mistaking his identity for Jewish.

Perpetrator

The stabber, identified as 21-years old Palestinian man from Qalqilya, was illegally residing and working in Israel. He repeatedly told police just after the stabbing that he carried out the attack "for Al-Aqsa." He spent time in prison in the years 2015 and 2016.

Attack on Israel embassy in Amman

Main article: 2017 Amman incident

On **23 July** 2017, a Jordanian man stabbed an Israeli guard at the Israeli embassy complex in Amman, Jordan. The Israeli authorities relate the attack to the crisis.

Disturbances in the West Bank

On **28 July**, Clashes were reported in the West Bank between Palestinians and the IDF, particularly in Bethlehem, Nablus, Kalkilya, Hevron, Kafr Qadum and the Tomb of Rachel. The Palestine Red Crescent said that one Palestinian was wounded by live fire, two by rubber coated metal bullets and ten from tear gas inhalation during clashes in Bethlehem.

Confrontations on the Gaza border

Hundreds of youths reached the border area between the Gaza strip and Israel on Friday, **28 July**. This was in response to a call by Hamas for protests to take place in solidarity with Palestinian Arabs in Jerusalem. An IDF spokeswoman said that soldiers opened fire at demonstrators trying to damage the security fence that separates Israel from Gaza. Warning shot were initially fired as protesters set fire to tires and hurled rocks. As a result of the clashes, 16 year old Abdulrahman Abu Hmeisa was killed and seven others were also wounded by Israeli gunfire.

Reactions in the Arab World

Jordan

Following the terrorist attack that killed two Israeli policemen, a Jordanian statement called Israel to "refrain from taking actions that will violate the status quo in Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque."

The Palestinian Authority

On **21 July**, Mahmoud Abbas announced that the Palestinian leadership will freeze all contact with Israel, as a protest over the new Israeli security measures. In order to

encourage the demonstrations, The Palestinian Authority Martyrs Fund offered financial compensation to those involved. After the removal of the metal detectors, Abbas announced and called the Palestinians to continue the uprising. Also, as the leader of the Palestinian Authority, he guided the Tanzim to spread the violence to Judea and Sameria, on **28 July**; the second day of rage.

Saudi Arabia

King Salman, sent a message to Jerusalem via the White House, urging Israel to reopen the Temple Mount to Muslim worshipers as soon as possible.

Why is Jerusalem's Temple Mount so disputed?

By Lauren Markoe and Kimberly Winston | Aug. 2, 2017, 2:16 p.m.

Jerusalem's Temple Mount is the holiest site in the world for Jews and the third holiest for Muslims — a place where millions of people have prayed for millennia. Yet, often, it is a launching pad for deadly attacks and counterattacks.

The most recent violence unfolded **July 14**, when three Arab residents of Israel fatally shot two Israeli police officers guarding the Al-Aqsa Mosque. In response, Israel erected metal detectors and cameras at entrances to the mosque. More deaths followed as three Israelis were stabbed to death in the West Bank, four Palestinians were killed in East Jerusalem, and this weekend a Jordanian worker stabbed an Israeli Embassy worker. After more than a week of violence — and a flurry of diplomatic closed-door meetings — Israel announced it would remove the metal detectors. But those are just the latest symbol of the wider struggle over ownership and control of the sacred site.

What is the Temple Mount and why is it holy to different groups? And why are some willing to fight over it?

What does the Temple Mount consist of?

The Temple Mount consists of three main sacred sites — the Al-Aqsa Mosque; the Dome of the Rock, sacred to Muslims for its ties to the life of the Prophet Muhammad; and the site of the Second Jewish Temple. The site is sacred to Christians, too, as Jesus is believed to have walked there. Its most visible feature is the golden-roofed Dome of the Rock, visible from much of the city.

There's actually no temple at the Temple Mount?

Right. There is a remnant of a retaining wall that helped support the Jewish temple. What is known as the Western Wall buttressed the Second Temple, destroyed by the Romans in the year 70. There are no remains of the First Temple, built by Solomon, the king of ancient Israel and Judea, and destroyed in the sixth century B.C. by the Babylonians.

Why was the First Temple built?

King David wanted to build a permanent resting place for the ark containing the Ten Commandments, a task that fell to his son, Solomon. In ancient times, the Jewish high priest would enter the temple once a year on Yom Kippur to pray to God on Israel's behalf. Orthodox Jews still pray three times a day for its restoration.

Rabbi Tzvi Graetz, executive director of the World Council of Conservative/Masorti Synagogues, said that when it was destroyed, "it wasn't just a building that was destroyed, an entire nation went into exile."

Is the Temple Mount holy to Muslims in the same way?

Not exactly. According to the Quran, the top of this mount was the holy landing place in about 620 for the Prophet Muhammad. After his "Night Journey" on a winged beast to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, Muhammad prayed, and the Angel Gabriel offered him water, wine or milk. The prophet chose milk, and Gabriel told him that meant his followers would follow the true path, Islam.

It is also the place from which Muslims believe that Muhammad ascended to heaven.

Can't Muslims pray at the top and Jews pray at the bottom without bothering each other?

On peaceful days, that's what happens. Muslims pray at the two mosques at the "top" of the Temple Mount — which they call the Noble Sanctuary — and can look over the edge to see Jews praying at the Western Wall below.

But both Israelis and Palestinians have intentionally upset the peace at the Temple Mount, knowing that any disturbance there is likely to send violent shock waves far beyond.

In 2000, Ariel Sharon, then the leader of Israel's opposition party, took a delegation to the top of the Temple Mount, inciting rioting from Muslims and sparking the Second Intifada, which resulted in the deaths of more than 4,000 Israelis and Palestinians.

In 2014, a Palestinian shot Rabbi Yehuda Glick near the Temple Mount. Glick wanted Jews to pray freely at the top of the Temple Mount, which Israel does not allow, for fear of inciting violence. Since his assailant was killed by Israeli security forces, Palestinians have mounted several attacks on Israelis. Israeli police have killed rioters and terror suspects.

So who is actually in charge of the Temple Mount?

Jordan pays the salaries of the employees of an Islamic waqf, or trust, that oversees the Noble Sanctuary. But Israel, which has soldiers stationed around the Temple Mount, effectively controls access to it. After the attempted assassination of Glick, for example, Israel closed the Temple Mount to men under 50.

What's this I hear about a Third Temple?

In Judaism, there is a belief that a new temple should be built on the ruins of the First and Second. But most Jews consider it an unrealistic and dangerous goal given that it would entail the destruction of the Noble Sanctuary. As Graetz puts it: "Some extremists have the terrible fantasy of blowing up the mosque and building a temple. That's not the kind of temple I would ever want to visit."

By Lauren Markoe and Kimberly Winston

Behind the Headlines: Jerusalem's Temple Mount

11.12.2014

The Temple Mount in Jerusalem, where the two Jewish Temples were located, is the holiest site in Judaism. Called Haram al-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary) by Muslims, the site contains the al-Aqsa Mosque, which is considered to be the third holiest site in Islam, the iconic Dome of the Rock (which is not a mosque) and many other small structures. The al-Aqsa Mosque is situated at the southern edge of the Temple Mount and covers a relatively small part of its surface. Most evidence places the historical Jewish Temples on a different part of the Temple Mount than that now occupied by the mosque.

Freedom of worship and the status quo:

Israel's official policy, first laid down in its Declaration of Independence, protects freedom of religion and worship for all faiths. Israel places the utmost importance on facilitating worship by Muslims and Christians in their respective holy sites, including in Jerusalem. Moreover, Jewish holy sites (among them the Western Wall), are open to visitors of all faiths, as are the Christian holy sites in Jerusalem.

Freedom to worship has not always been respected throughout Jerusalem's history. For example, in the modern era, Jews were denied the right to worship in their holy sites in the Old City of Jerusalem between 1948 and 1967.

After Jerusalem's reunification in 1967, Israel's leadership chose to uphold the existing status quo on the Temple Mount. Out of respect for Muslim sensibilities, it allowed the Islamic Waqf to continue to administer the Temple Mount, the holiest site in Judaism.

Non-Muslims (Israelis and tourists) are allowed to visit the Temple Mount at fixed times, but do not enter the al-Aqsa Mosque itself: they visit other parts of the site and usually walk around the large open spaces. In addition, Jews and other non-Muslims are not permitted to pray on the Temple Mount.

Prime Minister Netanyahu has repeatedly declared that the Government of Israel is committed to maintaining the status quo on the Temple Mount and will oppose any proposal to change it. The PM has instructed all government ministers to act responsibly with regards to this issue.

The Prime Minister has repeatedly stressed, in his talks with King Abdullah as well as in his public statements, Israel's commitment to preserving the status quo on the Temple

Mount and Jordan's special role regarding the holy sites of Islam in Jerusalem, as written in the Israel-Jordan peace treaty, article 9.

Palestinian violence on the Temple Mount:

While Israeli authorities take measures designed to ensure freedom of religion, allow access to Jerusalem's holy sites, uphold the status quo on the Temple Mount and maintain public order, there are many on the Palestinian side who are actively attempting to undermine the delicate balance and long-standing modus vivendi in Jerusalem.

In the past few months, Palestinian radicals have been trying to violate the status quo by preventing Christians and Jews from visiting the Temple Mount. Palestinian rioters are funded and led by radical Islamist elements, including Hamas and the northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel. They have attacked visitors, as well as the police, with rocks, fireworks, iron rods and even Molotov cocktails. These young men use the al-Aqsa Mosque as their base of operations for premeditated attacks, concealing weapons and explosive materials inside the mosque and hiding in this holy site overnight. In addition, well-organized groups of older men and women physically and verbally harass peaceful Jewish visitors.

The role of incitement:

Incitement to violence on the Temple Mount has been conducted by President Mahmoud Abbas and his Palestinian Authority [PA], as well as by extremist Islamist elements.

In recent statements, Abbas has announced that "all means must be used to prevent Jews from going up to the Haram (i.e. Temple Mount)." He called Jewish visitors to their holiest site a "herd." In the past, Abbas has disseminated lies, claiming that Israel is attacking the al-Aqsa mosque and that Jews are "desecrating" it. He has chosen to follow the path of his predecessor, Yasser Arafat, and deny the existence of the Jewish Temples on the Temple Mount.

Abbas' Fatah party and official PA bodies use traditional and social media to spread incitement. For example, on November 5, the PA's National Security Forces published a vicious cartoon on Facebook entitled "Al-Aqsa is being raped" which shows an Israeli soldier pulling down his pants about to attack a crying Arab woman who represents the mosque.

These and numerous other statements by the PA, led by Abbas, amount to official incitement to violence and can only serve to inflame passions among the Palestinians.

Sadly, conspiracy theories about the Jews threatening to destroy the Al-Aqsa mosque have abounded in the region for decades. These false claims, which are exploited by Palestinian and Arab leaders to incite the masses and rally them against the Jews, have often led to violent attacks, starting with the 1929 riots that led to the massacre of over 130 Jews in the Mandate territory.

The accusations that Israel plans to harm the al-Aqsa Mosque are utterly baseless and ridiculous. The fact that they are made not only by Islamist extremists but also by the mainstream Palestinian leadership is an alarming and dangerous phenomenon.

Protecting the Temple Mount:

The Israeli authorities have sought to contain attempts by Islamist extremists to escalate the situation on the Temple Mount while protecting Muslim sensitivities and freedom of worship. Access to the Temple Mount is only restricted when public safety and security is at risk. The Islamic Waqf manages the Temple Mount. Israeli police officers are not posted on the Mount and only enter the area in specific cases when riots have to be controlled. Most importantly, as a matter of policy, the police do not enter the mosque itself.

Although they often find themselves in life-threatening situations, police officers entering the Temple Mount are equipped solely with non-lethal measures. These self-imposed limitations by law enforcement officers are strictly observed.

At the same time, both Muslim worshippers and visitors from other faiths are expected to respect the status quo. Anyone who breaks the rules - whether they are Muslim, Jewish or members of another faith - is dealt with accordingly by the police.

It is the Palestinian rioters themselves who are damaging and defiling the al-Aqsa Mosque, including by transforming it into a base for attacks. They have destroyed furniture from the mosque for use in constructing barricades and launched fireworks from inside its premises, where carpets and wooden beams could easily catch fire. The rioters are also demonstrating their disrespect for the many Muslim worshippers who simply wish to pray in peace, as well as for the Islamic Waqf that is in charge of managing the site.