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1. Jordanian sees Jerusalem as a powder keg

Nicolas Kralev, The Washington times, 12/11/ 2009

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/nov/12/jordanian-sees-jerusalem-as-a-powder-keg//print/>

Jerusalem is a ticking time bomb where an attack by Jewish extremists on Muslim holy places could erase any chances for Israeli-Palestinian peace and undermine stability in the entire Muslim world, Jordan's ambassador to Washington said Wednesday.

Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid al-Hussein told reporters and editors at The Washington Times that the Obama administration does not seem to appreciate fully the precarious situation in Jerusalem and its importance for the Palestinians and other Arabs. He said that excluding East Jerusalem from any limits to Jewish settlement construction, as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has proposed, would end any chance for a peace settlement.

But it is the threat of an attack on the Muslim holy sites that "is the real showstopper [and] the issue that can turn U.S. policy on its head," Prince Zeid said. Yet "there is no discussion about this in Washington. ... Something is not working right."

The number of incidents between Israeli security forces and Palestinian and Jewish militants has been increasing at the place that Israelis call the Temple Mount and Muslims call the Noble Sanctuary. Dozens of people have been wounded and arrested in recent weeks.

Israel's national police chief, David Cohen, told reporters last month that the clashes began after calls from right-wing Jewish activists and a Muslim group, the Islamic Movement, for their followers to ascend on the mount.

Prince Zeid said Jordan is worried that those events could lead to another incident such as the 1969 fire at the Al Aqsa mosque set by Australian Denis Michael Rohan. The Jordanian said the ramifications this time would be far worse given the impasse over Israeli-Palestinian talks and the rise in Islamic militancy.

"We are worried that, in the short term, something like this might happen," he said. "It would unleash emotions of an extreme nature [and] the consequences would be very severe."

Mr. Rohan, a Christian who considered himself "the Lord's emissary" and said he acted upon divine instructions, was found insane, put into a mental hospital and later deported from Israel.

Mr. Netanyahu's position on Jerusalem is part of a proposed moratorium on new housing units in the West Bank that would allow for building or finishing about 3,000 new units. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton appeared to endorse this during a recent trip to the Middle East, apparently abandoning the Obama administration's initial demand that Israel freeze all settlement activity.

Mrs. Clinton said that, while Washington still wants a full freeze, Mr. Netanyahu's plan was "unprecedented" and it was a sufficient basis for talks with the Palestinians to begin. The comment infuriated Arabs and led Mrs. Clinton to make an unscheduled stop in Egypt to try to repair the damage.

Prince Zeid said such a position cannot be understood or shared by Arabs.

"If Jerusalem is left out of the mix, if you can't negotiate Jerusalem, there is no deal, even if you negotiate other components," he said. "Why should [the Palestinians] want to engage? There is no purpose behind it. What possible benefit could Arab countries get from it?"

If the Palestinians lose hope for a two-state solution because they are shut out of Jerusalem, pressure will grow for Palestinians to become citizens of an enlarged Israeli state in which they would eventually become the majority.

"If you can't have a two-state solution because of Jerusalem, can anyone think of any other way?"

Shortly after meeting with Mrs. Clinton last month, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said he would not run for re-election in January. His aides attributed his decision in part to what they called the secretary's apparent siding with Israel on the settlement issue.

Despite a full-time effort to get the two sides talking again and repeated trips to the region, the administration's special envoy, former Sen. George Mitchell, has not been successful.

Prince Zeid was also critical of Arab governments for "not marketing properly" a 2002 plan known as the Arab peace initiative, which included so-called final status issues, such as Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees' right of return and borders of a future Palestinian state.

He expressed understanding for the trauma Jews in Israel feel because of the Holocaust and their sense of being surrounded in a hostile region that he said made them fear making concessions.

But he said both sides were to blame for the failure to resolve the historic dispute.

U.S. officials "must be sitting there wondering what sort of people we are," Prince Zeid said. "They must wonder whether the Arabs [and Israelis] truly deserve anything other than the misery they have created for themselves. It's almost like watching two children fight."

2. Petition: Stop to demolitions in Jerusalem's Jabal Mukaber

Dan Izenberg, *Jerusalem Post*, 12/11/2009

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1257770043608&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

Mechanic Ahmed Shakir lives in his parents' 120 square meter home in the east Jerusalem neighborhood of Jebel Mukaber with his wife and three children.

He married in 1994 and has been living with his parents ever since.

The house is surrounded by two dunams of empty land which cannot be built on because according to the municipal plan for the neighborhood, it is designated as open scenic space.

In 1998, Shakir decided to add two rooms to his parents' home, which had been illegally built in the 1970s, so they could all have more living space. The city fined him and demolished the rooms.

The existing house suffers from dampness. Shakir's wife has developed lung problems and difficulty in breathing. The house itself is in danger of collapse.

Shakir's plight was included in a petition filed this week by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), Bimkom - Planners for Planning Rights and Ghasem Abidat, head of the Parents' Association of Jebel Mukaber, against the Jerusalem planning authorities in the Administrative Court of the Jerusalem District Court.

The petitioners are demanding that the planning authorities carry out a "proper planning procedure including an outline plan which will meet neighborhood needs and solve the grave housing shortage, including the lack of land for building, and provide solutions for the very low building densities and lack of infrastructure."

The plan should be completed in three years, they added.

In the meantime, the petitioners continued, the court must order the authorities to postpone implementing all demolition orders and desist from issuing such orders unless there is an urgent need for the land, until the new outline plan goes into effect.

"The lack of proper planning, the lack of consideration given in the existing plans to population growth, the severe restrictions in these neighborhoods, along with restrictive regulations which block the possibility of obtaining permits even in those places designated for construction, force the residents to build their houses without permission," the petitioners wrote.

These problems apply to many Palestinian neighborhoods in east Jerusalem, the petitioners wrote, but the petition refers specifically to Jebel Mukaber and nearby Suahra.

The two neighborhoods together cover an area of 4,600 dunams. In 1978, 11 years after Israel annexed east Jerusalem, the city began to prepare a plan covering 580 dunams. It is still in effect today.

The plan is characterized by the small number of plots designated for housing, low building rights of 25 percent of the size of the plot, and low buildings of two stories. Seventy-two percent of the land was declared open scenic land, where construction is prohibited altogether. Only 5% is allocated for roads, about one-quarter of the accepted standard.

The rest of the neighborhood area, some 4,000 dunams, is covered by another plan.

According to this plan, some 80% of the 4,000 dunams is not designated for housing construction. In the 20.5% of the land where construction is permitted, the building percentage is 37% of the plot on two stories.

Despite the obvious problems in the two plans, the planning authorities have allowed only three deviations, affecting less than five dunams.

In 2000, the city began to prepare an outline plan covering both the Jewish and Arab neighborhoods of the city. The plan will improve the current situation in Jebel Mukaber and Suahra, the petitioners wrote.

However, the new outline plan is in limbo. A few months ago, it was presented for initial approval to the Jerusalem District Planning Committee, which demanded many changes.

In the meantime, the process was suspended by Interior Minister Eli Yishai, who invoked his prerogative to study the plan. Since then, nothing has happened and there is no indication that Yishai's "study" will end any time soon.

3. Jerusalem's Train to Nowhere: The construction project that is just another dead end for Israelis and Palestinians.

Rachel Shabi, *Foreign Policy*, 12/11/ 2009

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/11/06/jerusalem_s_train_to_nowhere

Query Jerusalem residents about their new railway and the most common response is: Don't ask. Then locals will proceed to tell you all about it anyway: a long litany of complaints over the snarled-up roads, broken promises, and urban disasters involved in the ongoing construction of a light railway track through the city. Retailers fume over losses as shopping streets are carved up, shut down, or fenced off while rail tracks are laid at a snail's pace; residents rage at drastically lengthened work commutes; visitors despairingly shred maps as city roads are randomly closed or rerouted.

But the inconvenience is only the start of it: The Israeli rail tracks cross West Jerusalem and go through Palestinian East Jerusalem, which the international community defines as occupied and which is supposed to be the capital of a future Palestinian state. While Israeli officials maintain there's no political angle to the rail line, Palestinian critics see an attempt to unify Jerusalem by laying down infrastructure in occupied territory, against the Geneva Conventions. The dispute over the railway has become a flashpoint for Jerusalem's broader troubles: the increasing house demolitions in Palestinian East Jerusalem, the recent riots in the Old City, and the constant, simmering tension over who rules the holy city, and how, and what gives

them the right to, anyway. Even if the construction does one day end, the train's woes may have only just begun.

The Jerusalem Light Rail project -- a public-private initiative -- got started in late 2006. Electric trams will run on a single cross-city route with right of way and traffic priority at all junctions. Tracks are being set down across an 8.7-mile line that runs from Mount Herzl to the west of the city, through the center, past the Old City, into Palestinian villages of East Jerusalem -- Sheikh Jarrah, Shuafat, Beit Hanina -- and ending at the Jewish settlement of Pisgat Ze'ev to the north. An expected 44 trains will make 250,000 yearly trips on the tracks, charging a subsidized fare. There are an intended 24 stops on the line, but so far the only thing to stop has been work on the tracks -- repeatedly. The project has already failed to meet completion deadlines, and a battle focused on whose fault that is -- council or company -- is currently raging in the city courts.

Meanwhile, political pressure overseas is further gumming up the works. The French company Veolia, which was supposed to run the trains and has a 5 percent stake in the light-rail consortium, has just pulled out after losing major contracts in Europe over its involvement in the Jerusalem train line. A French Palestinian advocacy group got together with the Palestine Liberation Organization and is suing Veolia and another French investor, Alstom, claiming that involvement in the project is a violation of international law -- the case started in late 2007 and is still in court. To top it off, Veolia's planned divestment has sparked another row and is chewing up more court time: The Israeli bus operator Dan, which has no experience with railways, was going to buy out Veolia's shares, but now Israel's other bus operator, Egged, is complaining because it too wants some of the action.

Embattled Israeli officials claim that the rail line has nothing to do with politics, that it's just a long overdue measure to improve public transport services to all Jerusalem residents, Palestinian and Israeli.

But Palestinian campaigners think this is disingenuous. Omar Barghouti, a leading member of the Palestinian boycott-Israel movement, counters that the rail endeavor actually was conceived as a political project and points to the words of former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon, who signed off on the train system with this blessing: "I believe that this should be done. ... Anything that can be done to strengthen Jerusalem, construct it, expand it, and sustain it for eternity as the capital of the Jewish people and the united capital of the state of Israel, should be done."

Walid Salem, director of the Centre for Democracy and Community Development in Jerusalem, agrees: "It is a unilateral decision, imposing sovereignty over Jerusalem, without any agreements and in a way that meets only your own [Israeli] interests, not those of your supposed-to-be partners." Salem views the trains as an Israeli attempt to take Jerusalem off the negotiating table.

Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, while tentatively excited by the rail project, worry that they'll be excluded. Light-rail spokesman Shmuel Elgrably says that

service architects "don't differentiate between Arabs and Jews for public transport -- in fact the Arab population is more important to us because they use public transport more." Around 35 percent of Jerusalem's population are regular bus-riders; ultra-Orthodox Jews and Palestinians make up the largest component of users, though they don't share the same bus routes.

Elgrably maintains that, all being well, the bullet- and stone-resistant trains will run normally and carry everyone. But Palestinians in Shuafat point out that the stops don't seem located for their convenience. They think that just one incidence of violence could close down the line. For these Jerusalem residents, the prospect that the train's security stipulations will stack against them, just as they do with other forms of public transport, seems to be a given: Palestinians are more often stopped and questioned by security officials at bus and railway stations. And the trains could easily become targets in times of tension; if there are future Arab-Jewish clashes like the ones seen recently in the Old City, violence could spill onto the nearby tramlines.

Residents won't find out how it's all going to work until December 2010, assuming the line meets the most recent deadline for completion. Meanwhile, some of the store keepers on Jerusalem's Jaffa Road are taking bets as to whose grandchildren might actually get to ride on one of those shiny silver trains nestled at a nearby depot, awaiting their day on the tracks.

4. Palestinian cave-dweller fights Israeli eviction

Jihan Abdalla, *Reuters*, 11/11/ 2009

<http://www.reuters.com/articlePrint?articleId=USTRE5AA2E120091111>

JERUSALEM (Reuters) - A Palestinian camping in an ancient cave near Jerusalem says he has been told by Israeli authorities to get out because the hillside is slated for a housing development and his "illegal" home will be demolished.

The predicament of Abdel Fattah Abed Rabbo, a 48-year-old father of 10, highlights the dispute between Israel and Palestinians living in the steep hills between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, on land the Israelis annexed in 1980.

Abed Rabbo says he was actually brought up in the cave by his parents but occupies it now simply as a way of upholding his claim to 5 acres of stony hillside. His family lives in an apartment in a Bethlehem refugee camp.

"Three days ago, Israeli building planners came. They started landscaping this entire area," he told Reuters Television this week.

"The purpose is, of course, to build an Israeli settlement, called Givat Yael, which is to become the biggest settlement in the Jerusalem area," he said.

Abed Rabbo says he received his first demolition warning five years ago, and got a follow-up notice last December. In the meantime, he says, Israeli authorities have three times knocked down the tent camp he put up on the land at al-Walajeh.

He is tangled in a complex legal maze that Palestinians say is really all about national rights but Israel insists is simply about property rights and unauthorized building.

The land straddles the 1948 Green Line which formed Israel's eastern border at the establishment of the Jewish state. It lies just west of the Jewish settlement of Gilo, a suburb community of Jerusalem which is actually in the occupied West Bank.

The World Court has ruled that Israel's settlements are illegal. Israel rejects that and officials say, in any case, the community planned for Givat Yael will not be a "settlement," since the land has been part of Jerusalem for nearly 30 years.

TOWN PLANNING

Givat Yael is planned to house 45,000 people, with a commercial zone and sports center. The Interior Ministry's district planning office recently granted final approval.

"They consider my presence here a problem, because they want to be build 14,000 housing units on al-Walajeh lands," said Abed Rabbo. "I tell them the owners of this land are here, they are the rightful owners, and you've no right to build here."

Some 500,000 Israelis now live in settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, whose legitimacy is also disputed by the United Nations, the United States and most major powers.

City councilman for East Jerusalem Yakir Segev rejected claims that the hillside will become yet another settlement, taking land the Palestinians want for a future state.

"First of all, it's not a settlement," he said. "It's a neighborhood within the municipal borders of Jerusalem."

"Second of all ... they were given court orders -- not military orders ... It's not a matter of political dispute or political argument as far as we are concerned," he said.

The Israeli-run Jerusalem municipality has rejected a request by al-Walajeh Palestinians to legalize 95 homes in the village built without a permit and at risk of demolition.

"The village will disappear, because most of the houses are under the master plan of Givat Yael," says Meir Margalit, a left-wing opposition member of Jerusalem City Council.

Palestinians say Israeli planners have offered a number of concessions in return for consent, including retroactive permits for homes already built, a change in the route of Israel's West Bank separation barrier in the vicinity of the village, and easier access to Jerusalem.

So far they have refused these offers.

If al-Walajeh is legally part of Jerusalem, its residents might expect to have Jerusalem identification cards. But they do not "because of the Givat Yael project," says Margalit.

"It would be more difficult to expel them from their land if they had Israeli ID's." And without a Jerusalem identity, Abed Rabbo is an illegal resident in his own cave.

5. Mayor pictures a New Jerusalem

Divided City; Determined to restore 'eternal capital to world status

Peter Goodspeed, National Post, 9/11/2009

http://a123.g.akamai.net/f/123/12465/1d/www.nationalpost.com/1109_jerusalem.jpg

Jerusalem, with its sun-splashed golden walls and ancient holy places, is the heart of three of the world's great religions, but for decades it has languished as an economic backwater, trapped in the epicentre of conflict in the Middle East.

Nir Barkat, a multi-millionaire who made a fortune in computer antivirus software and who is now Mayor of Jerusalem, plans to change that.

He is determined to restore Jerusalem, the poorest city in Israel and its most complex, divided, and politically and religiously sensitive, to its former status as one of the world's leading cultural centres.

"Jerusalem, two or three thousand years ago, was a destination for people of all faiths. It was the centre of the world," he says. "Jerusalem still has that potential today. This is a special, amazing city, the eternal capital of the Jewish people."

But where New York had 48 million tourists visit last year and Rome welcomed more than 40 million, Jerusalem had only about two million visitors.

High on its mountain, brooding over the tormented sand hills of the Judean desert, Jerusalem's soaring spirituality has collided regularly with the Middle East's harsh realities.

It is one of the most fought-over cities in history, having played host to a long succession of conquerors from King David and King Solomon to the Kings of Judah, the Babylonians, the Macedonians, the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines,

Persians, half a dozen Muslim empires, the Crusaders, the Mamelukes, the Ottoman Turks, the British, the Jordanians and most recently the Israelis.

Yet Mr. Barkat thinks it is possible to return to a kinder, gentler past, when Jerusalem drew pilgrims and tourists from all over the world, who came to study the city's values, and experienced its cultural, religious and historical sites.

"When you ask yourself how many people are interested in the city of Jerusalem, the answer is over three billion around the world care and would like to visit Jerusalem at least once in their lifetime," Mr. Barkat says.

"My vision is to develop Jerusalem for the world, to open it up and to seek how we can attract more and more people to come and visit and enjoy the city."

By developing Jerusalem's economy, improving its infrastructure and exploiting its potential, through theme parks and more urban open space, Mr. Barkat says he hopes, within a decade, to draw 10 million new tourists to Jerusalem each year.

That could result in 140,000 new jobs in a city of 740,000 people.

"We have a 3,000-year-old brand," says the Mayor. "This summer we developed a festival of lights in the old city and with smart lighting systems the city walls came alive at night with visuals that take you back thousands of years. It was a phenomenal experience. It's an example of the huge potential one can develop."

In the year since the 50-year-old entrepreneur was elected mayor, he has established a three-point plan to transform Jerusalem economically, seeking to rebuild the city's economy around developments in the areas of

culture and tourism, healthcare and life sciences, and outsourced professional and business services.

He wants to reposition Jerusalem to attract young Jews and the investment capital needed to create jobs and build on Jerusalem's inherent advantages.

"We are now trying to develop festivals that engage different communities -- be they evangelical communities and Christian communities and of course Jewish communities -- and put some exciting night life in the old city," Mr. Barkat says.

"When you take our history, with faith and with culture, and mix that together, it is a knockout. It is second to nothing. It is the centre of the world and we want to share that with many, many people," he says.

Still, the status of Jerusalem is fiercely disputed. Israel annexed the Arab half of the city after the 1967 war and claims the unified city as its capital. But the international

community considers the eastern half of the city to be occupied territory, along with the rest of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Mr. Barkat, elected as a political independent, is staunchly opposed to any political division of Jerusalem and rejects Palestinian claims to the eastern half of the city as a potential capital for a future Palestinian state.

As Mayor, he also enforces the controversial court-ordered demolitions of illegally built Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem, which have recently been branded by British and U.S. diplomats as "unhelpful" to the peace process. The Palestinians and human rights groups claim the demolitions are used as a form of ethnic cleansing to shift East Jerusalem's demographic balance.

"There is a lot of misinformation and disinformation and people who try to create provocations around straight forward things," says Mr. Barkat. "In terms of demolitions, we demolished about 100 houses this year and 45 of those were in the west side of the city and 55 in the east."

"I manage Jerusalem under the law," he insists. "All of the demolitions are under court order. It's one law that's the same for everybody."

When U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently complained about the demolitions of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem, Mr. Barkat bluntly called her remarks "air without substance."

Still, one of the most controversial sites for recent demolitions is in the Silwan neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, just southeast of the walled Old City, where 7,500 Palestinians live, mostly in homes without the proper permits.

Mr. Barkat wants to turn the area into an archeological park, the City of David and Garden of King Solomon.

Yesterday, during a visit to Toronto, he defended the demolitions saying: "I wonder what the mayor of Toronto would do if somebody builds an illegal house right in the centre of one of the most important parks? I think I know what the standard would be -- obey the law. There are no excuses for not obeying the law."

6. Palestinians symbolically dismantle sections of the wall

Multimedia report, The Electronic Intifada, 10/11/2009

<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article10881.shtml>

"Tear down this wall!" then US President Ronald Reagan told Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987, demanding he tear down the infamous Berlin wall. Two years later, on 9 November 1989, media around the world broadcast images of crowds of Germans from both the east and the west climbing atop the barrier and tearing down large sections of the wall. For many, the event was highly symbolic as it was

perceived as the end of the Cold War and the start of a period when the world was headed in a more just and peaceful direction, free of walls keeping peoples apart.

However, two decades later, walls of separation still exist throughout the world. Israel's wall in the West Bank is much bigger than the Berlin wall ever was, as it encloses more than two million Palestinians inside the occupied West Bank. This wall separates Palestinians from their families, land, natural resources and communities.

For years Palestinians in various West Bank villages, along with Israeli and international supporters, have led regular nonviolent demonstrations protesting the wall. In Nilin village, located near the West Bank city of Ramallah, protestors decided to do something different on the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall.

In a symbolic action, the protestors in Nilin on 6 November were able to knock down a section of the wall before the Israeli army arrived and fired tear gas at the crowd.

Nilin media activists reported:

One protestor managed to climb on to the wall and he raised the Palestinian flag, hereby sending a message to Israel that the Palestinian flag will always go up on Nilin's land. Even if the land is cut off from the village now, the people of Nilin will never give up the right to their own land. Simultaneously, a group of youth threw bottles with red paint at the Israeli soldiers, the red paint representing the blood of the martyrs in Nilin that were killed by these soldiers.

A small group of participants brought a jack that they placed under one of the concrete segments of the wall. After two hours, the concrete started coming off the ground, partially falling down. This was a strong message from Nilin, one protestor stated: "last Monday the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall was celebrated all over the world; now it's time for the apartheid wall to fall and this will start in Nilin. We in Nilin are most determined to get our land back, and we will break down this ugly wall."

The video above, and images below, show the Nilin action that tore down -- albeit a small piece -- of the Israeli wall.

In a similar action on 9 November dubbed "We are going to Jerusalem," near the Qalandiya refugee camp outside Ramallah, hundreds of Palestinians along with dozens of internationals attached a rope to the wall as they used a truck to tear down one of the concrete slabs. As they demonstrated over the downed segment of the wall, Israeli soldiers arrived firing teargas and rubber bullets at the crowd.

7. Palestinian Authority's Future Is in Question

By ETHAN BRONNER, *The New York Times*, 10/11/ 2009

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/10/world/middleeast/10mideast.html?_r=1

RAMALLAH, West Bank — The collapse of the Palestinian Authority, Israel's negotiating partner, was raised as a possibility on Monday, as several aides to its president, Mahmoud Abbas, said that he intended to resign and forecast that others would follow.

“I think he is realizing that he came all this way with the peace process in order to create a Palestinian state, but he sees no state coming,” Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian peace negotiator, said in an interview. “So he really doesn't think there is a need to be president or to have an Authority. This is not about who is going to replace him. This is about our leaving our posts. You think anybody will stay after he leaves?”

Mr. Abbas warned last week that he would not participate in Palestinian elections he called for, to take place in January. But he has threatened several times before to resign, and many viewed this latest step as a ploy by a Hamlet-like leader upset over Israeli and American policy. Many also noted that the vote might not actually be held, given the Palestinian political fracture and the unwillingness of Hamas, which controls Gaza, to participate.

In the days since, however, his colleagues have come to believe that he is not bluffing. If that is the case, they say, the Palestinian Authority, which administers Palestinian affairs in the occupied West Bank and serves as a principal actor in peace negotiations with Israel, could be endangered.

Four top officials made the same point in separate interviews. Mr. Abbas, they say, feels at a total impasse in negotiations with the Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has declined to commit to a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, including East Jerusalem. Mr. Netanyahu favors negotiations without preconditions.

Azam al-Ahmad, head of the Fatah bloc in the Palestinian Legislative Council, said that he spoke with Mr. Abbas on Saturday and that the Palestinian president was likely to resign in the next month or so.

“Nobody will accept to be president under this situation,” Mr. Ahmad said. “We could witness the collapse of the Palestinian Authority.”

Ali Jarbawi, the minister of planning, spoke in similar terms in an interview, asking: “Why do we need anybody to take his place if the whole process is failing? If the authority is going to go on forever, who needs it?” But he suggested that the crisis was aimed at persuading the United States and Europe to become more actively involved in bringing about a two-state solution.

The Palestinian Authority was set up in 1994 as an interim governing body on the way to proper statehood, but that process stalled long ago with the second intifada in 2000 and Israel's reoccupation of the West Bank.

The officials who spoke said they were no longer interested in being part of an artifice that effectively masked Israeli occupation. While others might come forward to take their places, the new leaders would lack legitimacy with the Palestinians.

Since the 2007 split between the West Bank, dominated by Fatah, and Gaza, run by Hamas, parallel authorities have been established that refuse to recognize one another, blurring the legal definitions in Palestinian politics.

What is clear is that Mr. Abbas and those who work closely with him were shocked when the United States backpedaled on a demand that Israel freeze settlement building in the West Bank.

Mr. Netanyahu met with President Obama in Washington on Monday night, and Mr. Abbas's threat to leave office had been expected to be a part of their talks. When Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton was in Jerusalem last week, she asked Mr. Netanyahu to include in negotiating guidelines specific references to the creation of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders and in Jerusalem. He declined. President Obama took his time before granting the prime minister's request for a meeting.

Mr. Abbas, who is 74, is not only the president of the Palestinian Authority, but also the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the chairman of the Fatah political movement. Known as Abu Mazen, he took over from Yasir Arafat upon Mr. Arafat's death five years ago and was hailed by Israeli and American leaders as a very different man.

Rather than military fatigues, Mr. Abbas wore suits. He made a point of condemning Palestinian military actions against Israel as "terrorism" and saying that the second intifada was wrong. He gained the confidence of former hard-liners like Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert, and he was widely admired on the Israeli left. Some of those on the left now worry deeply about his decision, blaming the Israeli government.

As Ephraim Sneh, a former liberal cabinet minister, wrote in an opinion article in the daily newspaper Haaretz on Sunday, "The conduct of Abbas, the most courageous partner we have had, is in large measure a byproduct of our missed opportunities."

Not everyone regrets the expected departure of Mr. Abbas, saying his problem is not Mr. Netanyahu but the fact that he does not control Gaza and has no way of gaining control of it. Those critics, even moderate Israelis, say that a year ago Mr. Olmert, while still Israel's prime minister, offered Mr. Abbas a deal that included nearly all of the West Bank, land swaps for limited settlement blocks and shared sovereignty over Jerusalem. But Mr. Abbas turned it down.

Then, after first agreeing not to press the United Nations report by a team led by Judge Richard Goldstone of South Africa, which accused Israel and, to a lesser extent, Hamas, of war crimes during the recent Gaza war, he reversed position, thus first upsetting Palestinians, then ruffling Israelis.

“Abbas’s tenure as Arafat’s successor has proved an unmitigated disaster,” David Horowitz, editor of The Jerusalem Post, a newspaper that leans right of center, wrote Friday. “He lost the Palestinian parliamentary elections to Hamas in 2006. He lost Gaza physically to Hamas in the coup of 2007.

“He lost much of Israel in spurning Olmert, and even more of Israel, right now, in leading the calls for the Goldstone-facilitated international prosecution of Israel,” Mr. Horowitz said. “And, with quite spectacular ineptitude, he has managed to simultaneously doom himself among the Palestinians over the selfsame issue.”

Mr. Abbas misunderstood the political significance of the Goldstone report, some who know him say, because like the Israelis and Americans he actually has little faith in international bodies like the United Nations. He felt blindsided when attacked over this by some of his own aides and Arab leaders, and then switched positions on the report.

The aides said that given the split with Hamas, frequent accusations of being an Israeli collaborator and the American reversal on a settlement freeze, Mr. Abbas had simply lost any appetite for staying in power.

“He feels betrayed on all sides,” said Nasser al-Kidwa, a former Palestinian foreign minister.

But while aides and colleagues of Mr. Abbas say they understand, they also fear his departure, and many have been urging him to stay. Some thousands turned out to urge him to change his mind when he appeared in Hebron and Bethlehem on Sunday.

The maneuvers of the coming weeks will be complicated, and for Mr. Abbas to change his mind there will have to be clear gains.

Martin S. Indyk, vice president of the Brookings Institution and an adviser to George J. Mitchell, the administration’s envoy to the Middle East, was not optimistic.

“At the end of the day, I fear that the United States, Israel and the Arabs will fall short of meeting Abu Mazen’s requirements for staying on,” he said. “More than likely, we are entering a new era.”

8. East Jerusalemites skeptical on statehood

Abe Selig , THE JERUSALEM POST, 9/11/2009

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1257455213645&pagename=JPArticle%2FShowFull>

While anxiety is reportedly mounting within the government over the possibility of a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood, with east Jerusalem as its capital, residents of east Jerusalem - Arab and Jewish alike - told The Jerusalem Post on Sunday that they have little faith such a prospect would materialize, and were more concerned with their daily lives than with vague expectations for the future.

In August, Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salaam Fayad made clear his intentions to build institutions and infrastructure that would accommodate a future Palestinian state. The prospect of a unilateral declaration of independence, which has reportedly been gaining international support, has also sent jitters through the halls of the Knesset.

But inside a small kiosk on the bustling Salah a-Din (Saladin) Street on Sunday, Hamed, a tour guide who asked that his real name not be used, told the Post that the primary concern in east Jerusalem was earning a living, and not necessarily a rush to statehood.

"It's different for us," Hamed said. "Because we're from east Jerusalem, we're treated differently, even by other Palestinians. We have blue Israeli ID cards, when we travel abroad, we use Jordanian documents, and when we go into the West Bank, people think we're spoiled - but we're not. We are living with an isolated identity."

Regarding Fayad's plan, Hamed said that while PA officials in Ramallah might be excited about its prospects, the east Jerusalem street wasn't biting just yet.

"We have no faith in the Palestinian government anymore," he said. "Everyone knows that that they have no real power. When Fayad makes these kinds of declarations, honestly, people laugh."

Hamed explained that through his job, he was constantly meeting tourists who want to see "the fighting."

"But look around," he said. "There is no fighting. People are going to work. People are trying to make a living - that's what's important to us right now."

That Fayad's initiative was finding support abroad didn't sway Hamed either, although he did agree that if the PA were to take visible steps toward statehood, east Jerusalem residents would likely begin to rally behind them.

"I have family in Ramallah," he said. "We see what the PA is doing there, things have changed. We're beginning to see a semblance of law and order that we didn't see in the past. And Salaam Fayad is a Jerusalemite, which gives him more credibility. People want to trust him, we do feel that he's doing things to try and make a difference.

"And Abu Mazen has stolen his riches already," Hamed added, laughing. "I don't think he needs to steal anymore."

"But in the meantime, we're trying to get by, and however we can do that better, that's fine. But until we can see that the PA is serious about these plans, I don't think anyone will really believe it."

Down the street in a small bakery, a young employee named Jameel echoed Hamed's statements almost verbatim.

"I'll believe it when I see it," Jameel said when asked about the prospects of east Jerusalem becoming the capital of a Palestinian state. "People here haven't seen anything to make them believe that this is actually going to happen.

"You can say anything you want," he added. "Obama said he was going to pursue the peace process here, and that hasn't really gone anywhere. You can say you're going to take over the world, but can you actually do that?"

"I want there to be a Palestinian state, I'm hoping for it," Jameel continued, talking in between customers. "But in the meantime, nothing is happening on the ground to help me believe it."

Arab residents of east Jerusalem weren't the only ones to chime in on the matter on Sunday. Menahem, a Jewish resident of Ma'aleh Hazeitim, who also asked that his real name not be used, told the Post that Jews in the capital's eastern neighborhoods weren't paying any mind to Fayad's plans either, albeit for different reasons.

"Not in the least," Menahem said when asked if people were worried about such a plan's implications. "What we're paying attention to are our daily lives, and the marked increase of violence we've begun to experience here recently."

Menahem explained that stone-throwing, which he said was uncommon even a year ago in the Ras al-Amud neighborhood - where Ma'aleh Hazeitim is located - has become a normal, almost daily occurrence.

"But people aren't noticing because it's not being reported on," he said. "We feel that this is quite possibly a build-up to the third intifada, not a declaration of independence."

9. Israel: Stop East Jerusalem Home Demolitions - '57 Palestinians Forced From Their Homes in One Week'

Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, 6/11/2009

<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/11/06/israel-stop-east-jerusalem-home-demolitions>

(Jerusalem) - Israeli authorities in East Jerusalem should immediately stop demolishing Palestinian homes in violation of international law, Human Rights Watch said today.

In the week beginning October 27, 2009, Jerusalem municipal authorities used bulldozers to demolish five residences, while thousands more Palestinians are threatened with demolition of their homes. In the demolitions of the five buildings from October 27 to November 2, Israeli authorities displaced 57 Palestinian residents, including many children. Three other buildings were partly demolished. Israeli authorities justified destroying the homes primarily on the grounds that the owners lacked building permits, which are extremely difficult for Palestinians to obtain.

"The Israeli government is depriving Palestinians of the right to live in their own homes, in neighborhoods where many have lived for generations," said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "Basing this cruel destruction of people's homes on unfairly applied building regulations is a thinly veiled legal façade to force them to move out."

Israel has forcibly evicted or demolished the homes of more than 600 Palestinians, half of them children, in the West Bank and East Jerusalem this year, according to the United Nations. Israel's imposition of its building laws on Palestinians in occupied territory violates international humanitarian law protections for private property. Its application of the building permits law is discriminatory and is an arbitrary and unlawful interference in the home under international human rights law.

Jerusalem municipal authorities demolished three Palestinian-owned buildings on November 2, displacing 31 people. Residents of the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Abu Tor told Human Rights Watch that at 8 a.m., two bulldozers demolished the homes of the al-Shwaike and al-Qawasmi families, displacing 14 people. The buildings, joined by a common wall, were built in 1982.

"We didn't even know the building was going to be destroyed before it happened," said Haroun al-Qawasmi, who lived in one of the buildings with his wife and four adult children. "There were scores of soldiers there, and they told us that we had built the house without a permit."

Tareq al-Shwaike said that he was not informed of any demolition order before his family's adjoining building was destroyed, displacing him, his wife and three children, his mother, his sister and her husband. "The municipality told me I have to clean up the ruins of what they destroyed or else I'll have to pay when they do it," al-Shwaike said.

The third home, in the Beit Hanina neighborhood of East Jerusalem, was destroyed at around 2 p.m. Human Rights Watch was unable to contact residents of the building, but according to initial reports by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian

Affairs and by Al Maqdese, a Palestinian nongovernmental organization based in East Jerusalem, the demolition displaced approximately 17 members of the Rajaby family.

On October 27, Israeli authorities demolished two homes in East Jerusalem, and partly destroyed three others. Residents of a two-story building in the Sur Baher neighborhood of East Jerusalem told Human Rights Watch that scores of Israeli soldiers and police officers surrounded the building at 5:15 a.m. and ordered the residents to leave immediately. The authorities did not allow the residents time to remove their furniture or other belongings before three bulldozers demolished the building, which housed 17 members of an extended family, including five children.

"Soldiers entered our house without asking and detained my daughters and sons," said one resident who did not want his name used. "We only had time to get our clothes."

He said the building's first floor was built 11 years ago, and a second floor was added later to accommodate the owner's married children. A second resident said that his family had owned the land on which the house was built for at least three generations. The residents said the family had spent 150,000 shekels (US\$37,500) over the years in failed attempts to obtain a permit for their home.

At 9 a.m. on the same day, Israeli authorities demolished the East Jerusalem home of a 73-year-old Palestinian woman and her 32-year-old son, who did not want to be named. The son said he had constructed the building from pieces of wood and metal sheeting after Israeli authorities demolished their initial home on the site in 2006.

"We have been living on this site for 40 years," he said. "They destroyed our first house because we didn't have a permit. So I put up the zinco (sheet metal) building. It wasn't a permanent building, just a hut."

He received a first demolition order in May and a second one in September. "I can't afford a lawyer so I went to the court myself, but they told me, 'You don't have a file here.'" He was afraid the authorities would punish him further by fining him for the demolition.

East Jerusalem includes more than 70 square kilometers of the West Bank that Israel annexed to its territory in 1967, and remains occupied territory under international law. The Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 regarding occupied territories prohibits the occupying power from destroying private property unless such destruction is "rendered absolutely necessary by military operations."

Israeli authorities state that house demolitions are carried out against homes that have been built illegally without official building permits. However, a UN report published in April found that it is extremely difficult for Palestinian residents to obtain such permits under Israeli law, which Israel applies to annexed parts of the West Bank in violation of international law.

The UN estimated that roughly 60,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem currently live in buildings that the Israeli government has designated illegal. A December 2008 report by the European Union (EU) found that Israel was "actively pursuing the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem" by means including the construction of Jewish-only settlements and demolitions of Palestinian houses.

The European Union report concluded that Israel's housing policies in East Jerusalem unlawfully discriminate against Palestinian residents. Like Israeli citizens, Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem may obtain building permits only for buildings in areas zoned for construction. The Palestinian population makes up over 60 percent of East Jerusalem's population, but the Israeli government has zoned only 12 percent for Palestinian construction, according to the EU report. Even in this small zoned area, many Palestinians could not afford to complete the application process for building permits, which is complicated and expensive.

In contrast, Israel unlawfully expropriated 35 percent of East Jerusalem for the construction of Jewish settlements, for which building permits are much easier to obtain. Since November 2007, Israel approved building permits for 3,000 housing units for Jewish settlers in East Jerusalem, as opposed to fewer than 400 building permits for Palestinian residents, according to the EU report. Government policy, as stated in the Local Outline Plan for Jerusalem 2000, approved by Jerusalem's Local Committee for Planning and Building in 2006, calls for a ratio of 70 percent Jews to 30 percent Arabs in the Jerusalem municipality, including annexed parts of the West Bank.

The Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the occupying power from transferring its own population to the occupied territory.

"The Israeli government is destroying the homes of Palestinian families and causing unnecessary suffering so that it can expand illegal Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem," Whitson said. "Israel needs to respect the basic rights of Palestinian families to property and housing."

Human Rights Watch interviewed other East Jerusalem residents whose homes were partly or completely demolished in three separate incidents on October 27. Israeli authorities may impose heavy fines for illegal construction on Palestinians whose homes they bulldoze, so some East Jerusalem residents have "self-demolished" their homes to avoid financial penalties. One resident had begun but not completed "self-demolishing" his building when it was bulldozed, and was afraid of being fined by Israeli authorities. Another family whose home was demolished was still paying a fine of 60,000 shekels (US\$15,000) for illegal construction.

The Jerusalem municipality spokesperson's office did not immediately respond to Human Rights Watch's request for comment on the demolitions. According to the municipality's website, "The Municipality of Jerusalem demolishes buildings or parts

of buildings for reasons of urban planning, not for security matters . . . Municipal policy is to issue demolition orders only where illegal buildings are not yet occupied and where they interfere with plans for public facilities such as schools or roads, or with the city's historical heritage."

Israel's policy of demolishing the homes of Palestinians in East Jerusalem on the basis of difficult-to-obtain building permits, while facilitating the construction and growth of nearby Jewish settlements, is also discriminatory under international law. The prohibition against discrimination is spelled out in Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and codified in the major human rights treaties that Israel has ratified, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Ongoing and repeated home demolitions prevent residents of East Jerusalem from enjoying the right not to be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful state interference with one's home and the right to adequate housing. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which monitors the compliance of states with the ICESCR, has stated that "the right to housing should not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which equates it with, for example, the shelter provided by merely having a roof over one's head or views shelter exclusively as a commodity. Rather it should be seen as the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity."

10. Raed Salah found guilty of assault in 2007 riot case

Abe Selig , *THE JERUSALEM POST*, 5/11/2009

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1257417384398&pagename=JPArticle%2FShowFull>

Sheikh Raed Salah, the leader of the Islamic Movement's northern branch, was convicted in the Jerusalem Magistrate's Court on Thursday of assaulting a policeman during a riot in the capital's Old City nearly two years ago.

The incident took place in February 2007, near the Dung Gate, when Salah and four other Israeli Arabs allegedly took part in riots in protest of Israeli archeological excavations that were being conducted next to the Mugrabi Gate.

According to the indictment, Salah spit in the face of a Border Guard officer and yelled, "You are racists and murderers! You have no respect!" Salah and his cohorts also attempted to force their way into the excavation site.

Judge Yitzhak Shimoni said that he had received "reliable testimony from the police, which was later verified by video footage from a nearby security camera." Shimoni also said footage that had been recorded by police cameras installed on the Temple Mount had backed up the allegations against Salah found in the indictment.

After the verdict was read, Salah's attorney, Khaled Azbarga, said, "Sheikh Salah accuses the Israeli government of committing crimes at the Aksa Mosque. In an attempt to cover these real crimes up, the court accuses Salah of other crimes."

Salah found himself in legal trouble recently as well, when police accused him of fomenting unrest in the Old City during Succot. Scores of rioters were arrested and a number of police officers were injured in disturbances that sprang up throughout east Jerusalem, including in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. Salah, who was arrested at the time, was found guilty of incitement and barred from the Old City for a limited period.

Sentencing for Salah's conviction in the 2007 case is expected on December 24.

11. A Muddy Journey: Sewage Tunnel becomes transit point to Jerusalem

Mohammed Assadi, *Reuters Blogs*, 2/11/ 2009

<http://blogs.reuters.com/axismundi/2009/11/02/a-muddy-journey-sewage-tunnel-becomes-transit-point-to-jerusalem/>

[View video clip] Ordinary women and men, wearing plastic bags on their feet, pulling pants up to knee level, clutch their children to their chests and roam along a 110-metre dark tunnel of sewage to cross from the Israeli-occupied West Bank to East Jerusalem.

Erected under a barrier that Israel is building in the West Bank in defiance of a World Court ruling, the tunnel serves as a gateway connecting Palestinians from the West Bank to East Jerusalem, a centre for medical, social, religious and other services for the Palestinians.

The passage goes from the village of Old Beit Hanina in the West Bank to the area also called Beit Hanina in what Israel has annexed as part of its Jerusalem municipality. It was first used in early 2004, locals say, when Israel erected the barrier between the two Beit Haninas. What was originally essentially one village became physically divided in two. The tunnel was last used during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan in late September by people anxious to visit family or to pray in Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque. Israel restricts entry for Palestinians to the city. Since then Israel has blocked off the passage — not for the first time.

Scenes of people's legs sinking up to the knee in sewage are depicted in "Journey 110" by Palestinian artist Khaled Jarrar, who spent six hours capturing the 12-minute-long clip last year.

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip can only enter Jerusalem, which the Palestinians want as a capital for their future state, with often hard-to-get permits from

Israeli authorities. In 1967, Israel captured the territories including Arab East Jerusalem.

Local officials in Old Beit Hanina estimated the number of people who crossed the passage at up to 150 per day while it was open. "People are not doing it for fun and this is may be the only way to get to Jerusalem," said Saleh Daajneh, an official in the village.

When Israel first found out about it, soldiers blocked the passage with rocks but "tunnel operators" managed to find a gap for people to squeeze themselves out the other end of the tunnel. Israel says the barrier is needed to prevent Palestinian militants from attacking their cities inside Israel.

After Ramadan this year, Israeli bulldozers again blocked the entrance of the tunnel with rocks.

"There must be a compelling reason why these people have to go through this trip," said film maker Jarrar after a screening in Ramallah. His film will compete in the film festival "Instants Video" in France's Marseille next month.

12. Ir Amim claims proposed Jerusalem neighborhood will encroach on 'green zone'

Abe Selig , *THE JERUSALEM POST*, 2/11/2009

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1256799073645&pagename=JPArticle%2FShowFull>

Despite the fact that it conflicts with the "Jerusalem Master Plan" unveiled by Mayor Nir Barkat last May, and crosses over the capital's municipal boundaries into Gush Etzion, a proposal to build some 14,000 new residential units in southeast Jerusalem may be moving ahead.

According to an announcement released by the Jerusalem-based NGO Ir Amim on Monday, the Interior Ministry's district planning office will begin considering approval for the new housing project, dubbed Givat Yael, in the coming weeks.

The project, which according to Ir-Amim would create Israeli territorial contiguity from southeast Jerusalem to Gush Etzion, would also create housing for some 40,000 people just east of the capital's Malha neighborhood.

However, according to Ir Amim, the proposed development would also occur, in some places, beyond the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem and into Gush Etzion, and would encroach on land allocated by the Jerusalem Master Plan as a "green zone." The area was also allocated as such in the previous city plan, dubbed the "Jerusalem 2000 master plan", which was unveiled by former Mayor Uri Lupolianski in 2004.

Ir-Amim's announcement also raises the organization's objections to the plan based on revelations that the new construction would cut off the southeast Jerusalem neighborhood of Walaja from three directions, and isolate it from the West Bank.

Walaja, which straddles the Green Line just west of the Har Gilo settlement, was annexed into the Jerusalem Municipality in 1981, yet residents were not given blue ID cards as they were in other east Jerusalem neighborhoods annexed after the Six-Day War in 1967.

Additionally, the city's designation of the proposed area as a "green zone", Ir Amim stated, had been previously cited as a "basis for rejecting a plan offered by Walaja residents, who sought to expand the village's built-up area via retroactive approval of houses built without permits."

"Designating this land for residential use now in the master plan solely to enable approval of the Givat Yael initiative would signal once again that political considerations trump substantive and professional considerations in the decision-making of these planning authorities, with no regard for the well-being of local residents," according to Ir Amim.

"The fact that the project crosses the boundaries of municipal Jerusalem into the territory of the West Bank is evidence of a dangerous trend toward blurring the existing boundaries of the city in favor of the imaginary Greater Jerusalem - as manifest in the planned route of the Separation Barrier in the vicinity of Southwest Jerusalem," the organization added.

While residents of Walaja themselves have been steadfast in their opposition to the new project, construction planners for Givat Yael have nonetheless offered them a number of noteworthy concessions in return for their consent, including the retroactive approval for homes built without permits.

Residents however, have rejected the proposed construction project out of hand.

But, according to a municipality source, the area's designation as a green zone - and not Walaja residents' objections - may end up as the key point that halts the project once and for all.

While Barkat's master plan has yet to be fully approved, the source told the Jerusalem Post on Monday that the project, which has been put on hold for some six years, was not moving forward at all, and it had nothing to with "political considerations."

"From what I understand, the plan has stalled because it would be built on an area which was labeled as a 'green zone'," the source said. "That means, according to the planning, that the area is meant to be left as it is, and no construction, regardless of who is sponsoring it, would be permitted there."

13. Upping the ante at Al-Aqsa

Al-Ahram Weekly, 29/10/2009

<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2009/970/re2.htm>

Despite Arab government denials, Muslim officials on the ground confirm Jewish extremists are escalating plans to destroy Al-Aqsa Mosque, writes Khaled Amayreh in occupied Jerusalem

Government-backed Jewish religious extremists have stepped up their efforts to seize a foothold at Al-Aqsa Mosque esplanade in East Jerusalem, ostensibly in order to erect there a Jewish temple.

Al-Aqsa Mosque is one of the three holiest Islamic sanctuaries. The other two are the Sacred Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet Mohamed's Mosque in Medina in Saudi Arabia.

On Sunday, 25 October crack Israeli soldiers stormed the Al-Aqsa site, firing rubber-coated bullets, stun grenades and tear gas canisters at Muslim worshipers. The troops also savagely beat Palestinian worshipers, including women and children. The paramilitary police, known as the Border Guard, also briefly shut off the Noble Sanctuary (the 141,000-square metre court housing Islamic holy places), barring Muslims from accessing the site.

More than 20 were injured, some badly, and dozens of others arrested. The Israeli occupation authorities also cut off electricity to the Old City of Jerusalem, including Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The new violation of the holy site by Israeli forces followed a call by Muslim leaders in Jerusalem alerting inhabitants to go to the mosque and maintain a presence there to repulse a fresh attempt by Jewish extremists to storm the Noble Sanctuary and seize a foothold to practise Jewish rituals. Jewish extremists, along with some government officials, hope that persistent provocations at the exclusively Islamic holy site will allow them to worship at the site and eventually build a Jewish temple.

Many Jews believe that the ancient Temple of Solomon stood where Al-Aqsa Mosque was built more than 1,300 years ago. Destroying Al-Aqsa Mosque and building a Jewish temple in its place is said by some extremists to be a condition for the second coming of Christ.

In recent days and weeks, Talmudic extremists placed a huge menorah -- a Jewish religious symbol -- opposite the Dome of the Rock Mosque. Other extremists erected at the same place a model of the so-called Temple of Solomon. Israeli occupation authorities made no effort to stop the manifestly provocative acts.

Meanwhile, the religious Zionist camp in Israel, which spearheads anti-Islam provocations at Al-Aqsa esplanade, held a meeting in West Jerusalem during which Jews were urged to descend to the Islamic holy place and wrest it from the hands of the "goyem" (a derogatory epithet for non-Jews). The meeting was attended by several prominent rabbis affiliated with the settler movement, as well as several Knesset members and other extremist leaders.

Following the meeting, a statement issued called on Jews to maintain a presence at the "Temple Mount" to prevent Arabs from turning the site into "a theatre of violence". Participants urged Jews interested in "changing the status quo at the Temple Mount" to "work more and speak less" and to carry out their task "quietly and through subterfuge".

Earlier, the Israeli media reported that Israel was planning a "major archaeological excavation under Al-Buraq Court", renamed "the Western Wall plaza". Historically, the place had always been part of Al-Aqsa Mosque until the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem in 1967. The excavation, Muslim leaders argue, could seriously destabilise the foundations of Al-Aqsa Mosque and other nearby historic Muslim structures. Israeli officials pay little or no attention to Muslim protests and often invoke the mantra that Jerusalem is Israel's eternal and undivided capital.

Adnan Al-Husseini is the head of the Supreme Muslim Council, the body overseeing and running the Haram Al-Sharif compound. He accuses Israel of "planning to destroy Al-Aqsa Mosque by way of digging subterranean tunnels in its vicinity."

"When they speak to the media or meet with some Muslim officials from Turkey or Egypt and Jordan, they assure them that everything is fine and that the Islamic holy site faces no danger. However, we who live here and see things with our eyes on a daily basis are sure 100 per cent that Israel's ultimate goal is the demolition of the mosque and the building of a Jewish temple." Al-Husseini added: "Are we to believe Israeli lies and mendacious denials or our own eyes?"

Sheikh Mohamed Hussein, another prominent Muslim official at Jerusalem's Noble Sanctuary, described the situation as "very, very dangerous". "The Israeli authorities are trying to desensitise Muslim public opinion in the hope that Muslims at a certain point would accept a partitioning of this Islamic holy place. But, of course, this will never ever happen."

Hussein urged Muslim governments and peoples "to do away with words and routine condemnations and take meaningful measures to protect Al-Aqsa Mosque from Israel's evil design." He added: "The situation can't continue like this. The Arab-Muslim world must take immediate action to protect Al-Aqsa Mosque. Muslim states that have diplomatic ties with Israel must act as well."

According to Sheikh Taysir Tamimi, the chief judge of the Palestinian Authority, present Israeli provocations in Jerusalem are aimed primarily at partitioning Al-Aqsa esplanade.

"They want to take over Al-Aqsa Mosque step by step as they did with the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron following the massacre of 1994." There Israeli occupation authorities partitioned the mosque, one of the most ancient in occupied Palestine, between Jews and Muslims, giving Jews the lion's share of the ancient structure where the patriarch Ibrahim (Abraham) is believed to be buried. (In Islam, Ibrahim, Isaac, Jacob and other Israelite prophets are also considered Muslim prophets).

Muslims never accepted the partitioning, stressing that the mosque was an Islamic site of worship for more than 1,300 years.

On Al-Aqsa, demonstrations have taken place in several Muslim countries, calling on Muslim governments to take proactive steps against Israel, including severing diplomatic ties. However, it is highly doubtful that token protests by Muslims will deter Israel and stop extremist Jewish groups from pursuing their designs against the main symbol of Islam in occupied Palestine and the Levant region.

Indeed, it is quite likely that this crisis, which is a ticking bomb, will reach a critical point. One foreign observer in Ramallah remarked that "the peace process is nearly dead even without this powder keg surrounding Al-Aqsa Mosque. All I can say is that I foresee a lot of trouble and violence ahead."

14. Plan for new settlement in East Jerusalem on land of al-Walajah Village

B'Tselem Report, 29/10/2009

http://www.btselem.org/english/Jerusalem20091029_Givat_Yael_New_Settlement.asp

The press has recently reported a plan to build a new settlement on territory that was annexed to Jerusalem in 1967. Behind the plan are persons close to settler organizations in East Jerusalem, among them Meir Davidson, who was in charge of assets acquisition for the non-profit society Ateret Cohanim.

The proposed settlement, given the name Givat Yael, is to be located in southwest Jerusalem, on land of the Palestinian village al-Walajah. The land includes built-up portions of the village, east of the route of the Separation Barrier planned for this area.

The village of al-Walajah, which lies southwest of Jerusalem, was founded in 1948 by residents of the original village of al-Walajah, on whose ruins the moshav [cooperative settlement] Aminadav was built. The new village, in which 2,000 Palestinians currently live, was built on farmland of the original village. In 1967, Israel annexed to Jerusalem most of the current village's farmland, leaving a large percentage of the houses on land outside the city's municipal boundaries. Residents of

the annexed area did not receive Israeli identity cards. Therefore, they are considered “illegal residents” in their homes, and suffer from various kinds of harassment by Israeli authorities, primarily regarding building permits. The Separation Barrier’s route was originally intended to run along the Jerusalem Municipality’s border, between houses of the village. It was later changed, leaving all the village’s houses east of the barrier and all the villagers’ farmland west of it. The planned barrier will surround the houses on all sides, creating a finger of land that will connect the Har Gilo settlement to Jerusalem.

The plan was prepared by the private architectural firm of Jerusalem’s city engineer, Shlomo Eshkol, before he took his current position. The settlement will run from the south and east to the railroad tracks in South Jerusalem to the ridge of al-Walajah, creating a contiguous built-up area that will link Jerusalem and the Har Gilo settlement. The plan calls for 14,000 apartments, which will house 45,000 persons (1.5 times the population of the Gilo settlement). To realize the plan, it will be necessary to expropriate a massive amount of privately-owned Palestinian land, and it will possibly also entail demolition of some houses of residents of the village.

The plan has not yet been discussed in the local or district planning committees. The area on which the settlement is to be built is designated on Jerusalem’s new outline plan as a green area, on which construction is completely forbidden. However, the building plans in East Jerusalem classify many areas as green so as to prevent Palestinian residents of the city to build on them. Although the new outline plan has not yet been approved, the District Planning and Building Committee relied on it when it decided to reject an application submitted by residents of al-Walajah to approve 95 existing buildings in the village and its expansion.

In addition to the anticipated harm to residents of al-Walajah, who are liable to lose their homes, property, and village, building of the settlement will breach international humanitarian law, which prohibits the occupying power to transfer its population to occupied territory and to make permanent changes there. The establishment, existence, and expansion of settlements also cause ongoing and extensive infringement of Palestinian rights, among them the right to property, the right to freedom of movement, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to water, the right to sanitation, and the right to self-determination.

15. More Home Demolitions in East Jerusalem

OCHA and the Alternative Information Center (AIC), 28/10/2009

<http://www.alternativenews.org/jerusalem-info/2238-more-home-demolitions-in-east-jerusalem.html>

Yesterday morning, October 27, Israeli authorities demolished the homes of 6 Palestinian families in East Jerusalem. In total, 26 Palestinians, including 10 children, lost their homes yesterday, with another two families (19 people, including 8 children) affected by partial demolitions of their homes.

This brings the number of displaced Palestinians to over 600, half of them children, in this year alone as a result of forced evictions or house demolitions. At least another 500 have been affected as a result of partial demolitions of their homes.

Israeli authorities claim that house demolitions are conducted against ‘illegal’ structures that have been built without official building permits. However, as documented by the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the OPT and other agencies, impossible fees and requirements prevent most families from obtaining such permits, forcing them to build illegally to provide shelter for their families. The UN estimates, in a conservative figure, that “as many as 60,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem may be at risk of forced evictions, demolitions and displacement. Many others are facing mounting pressure to leave the city as a result of extensive physical, legal and administrative restrictions that affect every aspect of their daily lives.” Palestinian residents of Jerusalem who leave and relocate their lives elsewhere risk losing permission to live in the city.

Yesterday’s home demolitions consisted of:

1. Dahiyat al-Salam, on the outskirts of Shufat refugee camp

Israeli forces demolished the home of a Palestinian refugee family of 9 people, including 4 children, the youngest of whom is 5 years. According to the family, they were forced to self-demolish parts of their home, which at the time consisted of 2 structures, in 2006. The rest of the home, together with barracks which served as an alternative shelter, was demolished by Israeli authorities a year later. The structure demolished this morning, which consisted of 2 bedrooms, a kitchen and sitting room, totaled around 55 m² and was built in August 2008 by volunteers from the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD).

The family bought the land in 2002 from local residents. They report that shortly after the purchase, they received a visit from a well-known settler activist, accompanied by Israeli Border Police, who claimed he was the owner of 400 m² of land in the area. In 2006, Israeli courts ruled that the family should evacuate the land and issued demolition orders against the structures, which were subsequently demolished later that year and in 2007. In separate court proceedings the family was also fined a total of 60,000 NIS for illegal construction, which the family is still struggling to pay.

The family, who are registered as refugees, have no alternative residence or regular means of support. It is likely that part of the family, including the mother and the younger children, will try to seek shelter with family members in other parts of the city, while the father and the older children will camp at the site. The site, covered with rubble and broken furniture from the house, is not a suitable shelter, in particular as it now lacks water and sanitation facilities, but the family claims it has no alternative but to stay and try to rebuild their home.

2. al-Ghezayel area of Sur Bahir

Israeli authorities demolished the home of 4 Palestinian families. This includes (i) a family of 6 (2 parents and their 4 children, 3 of which are below the age of 18, including a child of 5); (ii) a family of 2 (the son of the first family and his wife); (iii) a family of 4 (another son of the family, his wife and 2 children under 18); and (iv) a family of 3 (another son of the family with his wife and a child).

The families report that they were not given time to move furniture and other personal belongings out of their homes before they were demolished, with the result that much of their belongings were destroyed.

3. al-Salaa neighbourhood in Jabal al-Mukabber

Israeli authorities this morning also demolished the home, consisting of barracks, in which resided a 75-year-old Palestinian woman and her son.

This is the second demolition suffered by the family. Their initial home, located in the same place, was demolished by the authorities in 2006. Following the first demolition the family sought shelter with relatives, before erecting and moving into the barracks that were demolished this morning.

4. Farouk neighbourhood of Jabal al-Mukabbir

Israeli authorities demolished part of the home of a Palestinian family of 5. The demolished part served as an extension to the home, which houses the 2 parents (the father being blind), his wife and their 3 adult children (of 18, 23 and 28 years). The family will remain in the rest of home in crowded conditions.

5. al-Ghezayel neighborhood of Jabal al-Mukabbir

Israeli authorities demolished the remnants of the home of a Palestinian family of 14 people, including 8 children aged 4-17. Following the receipt of a demolition order in September, the family demolished parts of its own building. The rest of the building was demolished by the authorities today. The family owns another building nearby, where it is currently living in crowded conditions.

16. Troubled Waters – Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water

By AMNESTY International, 28/10/ 2009

<http://www.miftah.org/PrinterF.cfm?DocId=20873>

Introduction

Lack of access to adequate, safe, and clean water has been a longstanding problem for the Palestinian population of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). Though exacerbated in recent years by the impact of drought-induced water scarcity, the problem arises principally because of Israeli water policies and practices which discriminate against the Palestinian population of the OPT. This discrimination has resulted in widespread violations of the right to an adequate standard of living, which

includes the human rights to water, to adequate food and housing, and the right to work and to health of the Palestinian population.

The inequality in access to water between Israelis and Palestinians is striking. Palestinian consumption in the OPT is about 70 litres a day per person – well below the 100 litres per capita daily recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) – whereas Israeli daily per capita consumption, at about 300 litres, is about four times as much. In some rural communities Palestinians survive on far less than even the average 70 litres, in some cases barely 20 litres per day, the minimum amount recommended by the WHO for emergency situations response.

Access to water resources by Palestinians in the OPT is controlled by Israel and the amount of water available to Palestinians is restricted to a level which does not meet their needs and does not constitute a fair and equitable share of the shared water resources. Israel uses more than 80 per cent of the water from the Mountain Aquifer, the only source of underground water in the OPT, as well as all of the surface water available from the Jordan River of which Palestinians are denied any share.

The stark reality of this inequitable system is that, today, more than 40 years after Israel occupied the West Bank, some 180,000 – 200,000 Palestinians living in rural communities there have no access to running water and even in towns and villages which are connected to the water network, the taps often run dry. Water rationing is common, especially but not only in the summer months, with residents of different neighbourhoods and villages receiving piped water only one day every week or every few weeks. Consequently, many Palestinians have no choice but to purchase additional supplies from mobile water tankers which deliver water at a much higher price and of often dubious quality. As unemployment and poverty have increased in recent years and disposable income has fallen, Palestinian families in the OPT must spend an increasingly high percentage of their income – as much as a quarter or more in some cases – on water.

In the Gaza Strip, the only water resource, the southern end of the Coastal Aquifer, is insufficient for the needs of the population but Israel does not allow the transfer of water from the West Bank to Gaza. The aquifer has been depleted and contaminated by overextraction and by sewage and seawater infiltration, and 90-95 per cent of its water is contaminated and unfit for human consumption. Waterborne diseases are common.

Stringent restrictions imposed in recent years by Israel on the entry into Gaza of material and equipment necessary for the development and repair of infrastructure have caused further deterioration of the water and sanitation situation in Gaza, which has reached crisis point.

Water shortages and poor sanitation services in the OPT affect all sectors of the Palestinian population and especially the poorest and most vulnerable communities, those living in isolated rural areas and in overcrowded refugee camps.

While Palestinians throughout the OPT are being denied access to an equitable share of the shared water resources and are increasingly affected by the lack of adequate water supplies, Israeli settlers face no such challenges - as indicated by their intensive-irrigation farms, lush gardens and swimming pools. The 450,000 Israeli settlers, who live in the West Bank in violation of international law, use as much or more water than the Palestinian population of some 2.3 million.

The restrictions imposed by Israel on Palestinians' access to water supplies in the OPT are manifested in multiple ways: control of water resources and land, and restrictions on the movement of people and goods make it excessively difficult for Palestinians to access their water resources and to develop and maintain the water and sanitation infrastructure. Furthermore, a complex system of permits which the Palestinians must obtain from the Israeli army and other authorities in order to carry out water-related projects in the OPT has delayed and rendered more costly, and in many cases prevented, the implementation of much needed water and sanitation projects.

During more than four decades of occupation of the Palestinian territories Israel has overexploited Palestinian water resources, neglected the water and sanitation infrastructure in the OPT, and used the OPT as a dumping ground for its waste – causing damage to the groundwater resources and the environment. Urgent measures are now needed to ensure that adequate water supplies are made available today and in the future, and to prevent further damage to the water resources and the environment.

Israeli policies and practices in the OPT, notably the unlawful destruction and appropriation of property, and the imposition of restrictions and other measures which deny the Palestinians the right to water in the OPT, violate Israel's obligations under both human rights and humanitarian law.

Due to Israel's failure to fulfil its obligations, as the occupying power, the burden of dealing with these challenges has fallen to international donors and, since its establishment in the mid 1990s, to the Palestinian Authority (PA), the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA), and other local service providers, all of whom depend on international donors for funds. Yet, the Israeli authorities continue to obstruct Palestinian and international efforts to improve access to water in the OPT.

In the face of water shortages and amid deepening poverty in recent years some Palestinians have resorted to drilling unlicensed wells, while others have connected to the water network illegally, and many have stopped paying their water bills. These practices have further compounded the problem by undermining the economic viability and the authority of the PWA, which has proved to be unable or unwilling to stop such practices.

The restrictions imposed by Israel on access to and development of water resources for Palestinians have been accompanied by other factors that have hindered the efficient delivery of many urgently needed water and sanitation projects in the OPT. These include the PWA's near-total dependence on international donors for funds, donors' choices and priorities, and poor coordination among donors. Adding to this, the PA and PWA have been beset by internal divisions compounded by weak and fragmented management structures, lack of expertise and of political will, and allegations of mismanagement and corruption.

This report examines the main patterns and trends affecting access to water for Palestinians in the OPT, and analyses how these are impacting severely on the population's rights, as protected under international human rights and humanitarian law, and which are necessary for the Palestinians to live in dignity.

NOT EVEN A DROP

On 10 March 2008, Fa'iq Ahmad Sbeih received a visit from an Israeli army patrol at his farm in al-Farisiya, a few km north of Jiftlik, in the Jordan Valley area of the West Bank. The soldiers confiscated 1,500 metres of rubber hose which brought water to his farm from a spring on a hill above his land, and crushed the small metal pipe which was connected to the hose. The confiscation order delivered by the army stated that the hose was confiscated "due to lack of permit". The army considers the spring water as "state property"

In the past, local farmers had tried to build a water cistern to collect water from the spring and to harvest the rain water but the army prevented them, because they did not possess, and could not obtain from the army, a permit to do so. When an Amnesty International delegate visited the farm on 11 March 2008 Fa'iq Sbeih was beside himself with worry: "This is my family's livelihood. We work day and night and we need water; and the weather is getting hotter every day. Already the situation is difficult this year because we have had so little rain; you can see how little water there is in the stream and we only took a bit of it. I can't buy another pipe; and if I do the army may come and take it again."

The army subsequently returned the rubber hose to Fa'iq Sbeih, though it was damaged and no longer usable, and reiterated the ban on him using the water from the spring. With the onset of the hot season he tried to keep some of his crops alive by buying water from other areas, delivered by tanker, but he still lost most of the crop.

Without access to water from the spring Palestinian farmers like Fa'iq Sbeih have no option but to travel several km to buy small quantities of water that they then transport to their orchards by tanker. This is the most expensive way to obtain water, the more so because the restrictions imposed by the Israeli army require the water tankers to take long detours and circuitous routes to make their deliveries. The unlawful Israeli settlements which surround al-Farisiya face no such problems. Their residents have free access to the water from the spring which Fa'iq Sbeih and his

family are not permitted to use, and which forms a small stream that flows down towards the Israeli settlements. As well, they have ready access to an abundant supply of water from nearby wells to which Fa'iq Sbeih and other Palestinian farmers have no access.

The nearby Israeli settlement of Shadmot Mechola advertises on its website: "Breathtaking tours to Amaryllis bulbs hot houses which are harvested, packed and shipped to Europe and USA and potted in time to bloom during the winter holiday season. Short tours of our "Hi-tec" dairy farm, vineyards and orchards. Tours of farms in the Jordan Valley who specialize in crops of vegetables, fruits, flowers and spices for export in hot dry climate."

According to one international water expert, commenting on the discriminatory use of water by Israeli settlers in the OPT: "It is easy to make the desert bloom by using someone else's water and by denying them access to their fair share of water."

17. Spinning out of control?

ORLY NOY , *THE JERUSALEM POST*, 27/10/2009

<http://www.jpost.com /servlet/Satellite?cid=1256557977272&pagename=JPArticle%2FShowFull>

Jerusalem's simmering embers were stoked again Sunday in a confrontation that broke out between Muslims who barricaded themselves in the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, and Israeli police who came to remove them. Much to our concern, images of riots on the site have become routine in the past few weeks, and they put us in a dangerous cycle.

The careless conduct of both the Israeli and Palestinian side is liable to cause the situation to deteriorate quickly and easily into violence. Thus, the entry of a group of visitors to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif a month ago, on the eve of Yom Kippur, ignited a wave of violent riots that went on for days and caused injuries among the demonstrators and policemen alike.

As a result, Israel limited the entry of Muslims to the al-Aksa Mosque, causing a wave of additional protests and ongoing arrests of Islamic Movement leaders such as Sheikh Ra'ed Salah, Kamal Khatib and Ali Abu Sheikha. At the same time, the archeological excavations continue in and around the Old City, which are largely financed by extreme right-wing organizations.

These excavations, some of which pass under the homes of Palestinian residents - like the explicit efforts of right-wing organizations to expand the Jewish presence in the heart of the Old City's Muslim Quarter - raise intense fear among Muslims in the area and in the world, a fear that is channeled by radical Islamist organizations in order to stoke the flames and draw the Muslim masses out of their homes for the sake of "defending al-Aksa."

THE SAME dangerous oscillation, in which actions of extremists on one side immediately nourish the actions of extremists on the other, repeated itself this time as well: A conference of the "Joint Headquarters of the Temple Mount organizations," with the participation of Knesset members and rabbis from the extreme Right, whose aim is to "call upon the people of Israel to visit the Temple Mount in holiness and purity," led the Al-Aksa Foundation and the Islamic Movement to call on the Palestinian masses to go to al-Aksa Mosque, and "protect it from the planned invasion."

This is a dynamic of publicly announced escalation, as everyone understands that a mass call by public figures and rabbis for Jews to visit the Temple Mount can be expected to ignite an extreme response from the Muslim public.

In light of this, especially grave was the intention of Kadima MK Otniel Schneller to participate in the conference alongside extremists from the Israeli Right. Although he changed his plans due to pressures exerted upon him, we still should question whether Schneller represents the position of the political party that professes to be a center party. Has Kadima adopted the platform of MK Michael Ben-Ari (National Union), a disciple of Meir Kahane, on this most sensitive issue in the Israeli-Arab conflict? Kadima head Tzipi Livni maintains a puzzling silence on this central issue, but also puzzling is the silence of the government given the ongoing provocations by extreme factions, which seek to exacerbate the conflict in Jerusalem and to give it a religious dimension.

Past experience teaches us that strengthening the religious dimension of the conflict in Jerusalem is liable to drag the region into an ongoing cycle of extreme violence, which would place Israel opposite a unified and hostile Arab-Muslim front. Incidents of the past weeks led to rowdy demonstrations even in moderate Muslim countries such as Turkey, while our ambassador in Jordan was called in for a reprimand by the Foreign Ministry.

If the government is not determined to stop the mutual and ongoing provocations that fuel this dangerous conflict, these examples are liable to be only the first signs of what the future may hold.

The writer is an outreach coordinator at Ir Amim. She is a long-time social change activist, and has been involved in editing and hosting a variety of public events on social issues and human rights.

18. Violent clashes erupt at Jerusalem's holiest site

By MATTI FRIEDMAN, Associated Press, 25/10/ 2009

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/articleALeqM5hYTesV9e3EbcBnE0OuFYyfEX0UcQD9BIA1N00>

JERUSALEM — Israeli police firing stun grenades faced off Sunday against masked Palestinian protesters hurling stones and plastic chairs outside the Holy Land's most volatile shrine, where past violence has escalated into prolonged conflict.

A wall of Israeli riot police behind plexiglass shields marched toward young men covering their faces with T-shirts and scarves, sending many of them running for cover into the Al-Aqsa mosque, one of the Islamic structures in the compound known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary.

They remained holed up in the mosque with police outside for several hours until dispersing before nightfall. Eighteen protesters were arrested, and no serious injuries were reported. But even mild troubles at the disputed compound in Jerusalem's Old City can quickly ignite widespread unrest, and police remained on high alert.

"Jerusalem is a red line that Israel should not cross," said Palestinian Authority spokesman Nabil Abu Rdeneh, condemning the Israeli police action.

A visit to the site in 2000 by Ariel Sharon, then an Israeli opposition leader and later prime minister, helped ignite deadly clashes that escalated into violence that engulfed Israel and the Palestinian territories for several years. Sunday's disturbances were rooted in calls from Muslim leaders for their followers to protect the Islamic sites from what they said were Israeli plots to damage them or let Jews pray in the compound. There was no evidence to support either claim.

Palestinians are also angry about stalled peace talks and ongoing Israeli construction in east Jerusalem and the West Bank, areas they want for a future state.

Stoking tensions, a group of hardline settlers and rabbis met in Jerusalem on Sunday evening calling on Jews to pray at the site. Most rabbis, however, say the place is so holy that Jews should not even set foot there. Police allow only Muslims to worship in the compound and say that practice will be enforced.

Israel has controlled the site since 1967, but has left day-to-day administration in the hands of a Muslim clerical body, the Waqf. Israelis and tourists are allowed to visit at certain times. Israel's national police chief, David Cohen, accused a small group of Muslim extremists of trying to foment violence.

"The police will act with a strong hand against anyone who disrupts order on the Temple Mount and against those incite to riot," Cohen said.

The Jerusalem holy site is a hot-button issue for Muslims worldwide, and the Palestinian condemnation was quickly taken up abroad. The head of the 57-nation Organization of the Islamic Conference warned that any provocative act by Israel

"would bear grave consequences," while the Arab League called on the U.N. to "stop the Israeli aggressions." Egypt urged Israel to refrain from actions with "negative repercussions" for the region.

The Islamic militant Hamas movement, which rules the Gaza Strip, called on Palestinians to rise up against Israel and urged Arab countries that have ties to Israel to sever them.

Nine police officers were lightly wounded and 18 protesters were detained, police said. The Palestinian president's adviser on Jerusalem affairs and a leader from Israel's Islamic Movement were arrested for alleged incitement, police said. A total of 25 protesters were injured by batons or gas inhalation, said Ameen Abu Ghazaleh, head of the Palestinian Red Crescent's ambulance service. An Australian journalist covering the clash was struck in the face by a rock and lightly wounded, Israeli police said. The disputing claims to the man-made platform in Jerusalem's Old City lie at the heart of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. It is revered as the holiest site in Judaism, home to two biblical Temples, and Jews pray at the foot of the compound at the Western Wall. In the Islamic tradition, it is the place where the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven in a nighttime journey recounted in the Quran, and is considered the third-holiest site after the Saudi cities of Mecca and Medina.

Israel has carried out numerous archaeological digs in nearby areas, but has denied Palestinian allegations that the work could endanger the compound. The Palestinians seek to make east Jerusalem — including the holy compound — the capital of a future independent state. Israel's government says it will not share control of the holy city.

Associated Press Writers Michael Barajas and Dalia Nammari contributed to this report.

19. Israel Plans Major Excavation at Western Wall

Samuel Sokol, *Israel National News*, 23/10/2009

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/134009>



(IsraelNN.com) Israel is planning a major archaeological dig under the Western Wall (Kotel) plaza, opposite the Temple Mount, officials announced Thursday. The excavations will create an archaeological park directly underneath the area where worshippers currently stand while praying at the Kotel.

The current prayer area will remain open, supported by pillars, while a new area will be added underneath, at the level at which worshippers at the ancient Temple stood in the past.

The dig may be met with harsh reactions from Muslim and Arab leaders in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, many of whom have accused Israel of attempting to damage the Al-Aksa Mosque on the Temple Mount. Jerusalem-area Muslims recently rioted for several days after it was rumored that “Jewish settlers” had planned to pray on the Temple Mount.

The Government Press Office gave foreign journalists a tour of Kotel-area excavations this week. The tour, ostensibly an apolitical opportunity to view new historic findings, appeared to be aimed at countering Muslim criticism of Israeli excavations as well. See drawing of planned archeological park

A reference to Salah

Kotel Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovitch met with the journalists and criticized religious leaders who use the Kotel excavations as an excuse for violence. When asked, the rabbi said that he was referring to Sheikh Raed Salah, among others. Sheikh Salah, leader of the extremist Islamic Movement, has been involved in many of the anti-Israel riots centered around the Temple Mount.

Rabbi Rabinovitch informed the reporters that Jewish law forbids digs directly underneath the Temple Mount, where the Al-Aksa mosque is located. Digs take place around the mount, not beneath it, he said.

The journalists also met with engineers and others involved in the archaeological digs, who assured them that despite accusations to the contrary, Israel's excavations do not cause harm to structures in the area. In fact, they explained, the excavations have improved structural stability in the Temple Mount area, as they led to discovery and strengthening of areas in which there was a danger of collapse.

20. JCESR: 150 Palestinian homes awaits imminent demolition

13/10/2009, JCESR

http://www.jcesr.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=326:jcesr-150-palestinian-homes-awaits-imminent-demolition-&catid=23:pressreleases-2009&Itemid=26

Jerusalem Center for Social and Economic Rights warned of the occupation new plans to demolish some 150 Palestinian homes situating in various locations in the occupied city. Demolition orders were signed by the previous and current Israeli mayors Uri Luplianski and Nir Barkat.

According to JCESR's Research and Documentation Unit, Palestinians homes that are threatened with imminent demolition located in Jerusalem neighborhoods of Beit Haninah, Shu'fat, Ashqariyeh, Nusiebeh Housing Project, Silwan, Thuri, Jabal al-Mukaber, Sur Baher, Mount of Olives, al-Zu'ayem, Isawieh and Ras Khamis.

JCESR estimates that more than one thousand Palestinians will be displaced in case the occupation municipality implements its plans. However, the new number of slated Palestinian homes for demolition does not include 125 apartments which were previously issued demolition orders.

According to JCESR, the demolitions of two Palestinian homes in Beit Haninah and Ashqariyah, are part of a series of demolitions to be conducted until the end of this year which will included 150 Palestinian homes issued demolition orders by the Israeli municipality of Jerusalem.

Yesterday, Israeli bulldozers knocked down one Palestinian home owned by Amjad Tiryaki which used to provide shelter for 5 persons. In another incident, Israeli bulldozers demolished part of Majed Abu Eisheh's home which is situated in Beit Haninah. The demolition was conducted despite the fact that its owner did not get any demolition order issued by any of the Israeli courts.

According to JCESR estimates Israeli occupation demolished 61 Palestinian homes since the beginning of the year, while 18 homes were demolished by their owners to evade paying costly fines which the municipality imposed on them and they cannot afford.

Meanwhile the so called Custodian of Absentees Properties took over 200 Palestinian homes locating inside the Old City of Jerusalem which are now controlled over by Israeli settlement organizations. Elad organization controls over 70 settlement enclaves including 40 in Silwan and Ras al-Amud.

JCESR estimates that Palestinians in Jerusalem require over 2000 housing units per year to cope with their rate of population growth, yet the Municipality issued only 18 construction permits in 2008, according to deputy mayor for East Jerusalem affairs

Yakir Segev. However, the 18 permits, one license for building retaining walls for Yousfiyeh Moslem cemetery.

In occupied Jerusalem, there are over 20,000 Palestinian constructions outstanding demolition orders according to the Municipality statistics.

21. Flirting with the apocalypse

By Daniel Seidemann and Lara Friedman, *Haaretz*, 11/10/2009

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1119830.html>

Jerusalem has once again emerged in recent days as the focal point of dangerous tensions that threaten to erupt into violence or even a third intifada. Much of the media analysis has overlooked the fact that this situation did not arise out of a vacuum, but is the latest manifestation of tensions that have been steadily growing for months.

These tensions are in part a by-product of U.S. President Barack Obama's peace efforts. Fear that he may ultimately succeed in launching a peace process has driven various spoilers to undertake provocative actions, and Obama's failure thus far has emboldened these people to act even more recklessly and energetically, while noticing an opportunity to change the status quo - in particular in the Old City and the Holy Basin - and foreclose any chance for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement.

For anyone tracking the situation on the ground, it is clear that the potential for a violent conflagration in Jerusalem is greater now than at any point since September 2000, when then-opposition leader Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount, triggering the second intifada, the worst wave of Israeli-Palestinian violence since 1967. This is no coincidence: The current mix of destabilizing factors is hauntingly familiar.

Politically, the parallels are clear. An ambitious move stalls - Camp David back then, a settlement freeze and resumption of final status talks now - and this discredits the political process and gives rise to skepticism, if not contempt, about the peace process and its advocates.

The fact that Jerusalem is once again at the heart of the matter is no coincidence either. The city is the major fault line of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and earthquakes have been triggered invariably by events in and around the volcanic core of that conflict: the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. It is precisely in this area - spreading from Sheikh Jarrah to Silwan - where events today have begun to careen out of control. The approval of a new settlement at the Shepherd Hotel, the eviction of Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah, the wounding of two Palestinians by settler gunfire in Silwan, a Supreme Court ruling allowing settler excavations under private Palestinian homes in Silwan while imposing almost punitive court costs on the Palestinian plaintiffs - all this has already led to manifestations of Belfast-like intercommunal skirmishing.

If the timing - in terms of the annual cycle - seems familiar, it is no surprise: Most eruptions in Jerusalem occur around the Jewish High Holidays. Recall the 25 Palestinians killed on the Temple Mount during Sukkot in 1990, the opening of the Hasmonean Tunnel during Sukkot in 1996, Sharon's Temple Mount visit on the eve of Rosh Hashanah in September 2000, etc.

Finally, there is no shortage of Muslim and Christian extremists fanning the flames. Witness Arab extremists like northern Islamic Movement leader Ra'ad Salah, touting fabricated reports of the imminent destruction of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and failed U.S. presidential candidate Mike Huckabee on his "I Love Jerusalem Settlers" tour in August.

The pyromaniacs are out in force, weakening the forces of moderation and dictating the agenda. Tensions are high, and the stakes could not be higher. To make it through these delicate days with the city - and prospects for peace - intact, it is vital that all sides act with utmost restraint and responsibility.

For Israel, this means that early intervention - such as prevention, for the sake of public order, of any inflammatory event (Israeli or Palestinian) - should be the operational imperative. It also means no provocations: no new settlement activity, tunneling, demolitions or evictions. No symbolic or ceremonial activities on the exposed nerves of the conflict. Israel's actions in all these arenas will, perhaps more than any other factor, determine whether the current tension dissipates or escalates into a conflagration.

For the Palestinians and the Arab/Muslim worlds, acting responsibly means not stoking the fires of extremism with polemical rhetoric and hyperbole. This does not mean acquiescing to highly problematic Israeli policies in East Jerusalem. Al-Aqsa today is not in danger, but Palestinians in East Jerusalem constitute a community at risk, and the creation of an exclusionary settler hegemony around the Old City threatens to marginalize the Muslim and Christian presences in Jerusalem. The Palestinian Authority and forces of moderation in the Arab world can and should articulate genuine concerns, and demand that Israel act responsibly. Furthermore, they must also demand the same of all Palestinian factions, making clear that cynical manipulation of Jerusalem to gain domestic political points is not acceptable.

Finally, for the international community, acting responsibly requires engaging seriously and proactively, at the highest political levels. Making clear to all stakeholders that the world will not tolerate reckless Messianic games in Jerusalem. And making clear that the world recognizes that what happens in Jerusalem is not confined to Jerusalem: It has the potential for far-reaching and dire consequences across the region, including with respect to Iran and beyond.

Daniel Seidemann is a Jerusalem attorney and founder of Ir Amim, an Israeli nongovernmental agency. Lara Friedman is director of policy and government relations for Americans for Peace Now.

22. Who is really to blame for the tensions on the Temple Mount?

Avi Isaacharoff, *Haaretz*, 9/10/2009

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1118873.html>

Palestinian clashes with Israeli police on Sunday and on the day before Yom Kippur near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem's Old City have made foreign diplomats wonder whether Israel is enacting a new policy on the Temple Mount, which is serving to exacerbate tensions.

Media outlets and senior Palestinian Authority officials have contributed significantly to this perception after repeatedly claiming that Israel is planning to allow a group of "extremist settlers" to pray at the mosque. Even the Egyptian foreign minister, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, has blamed Israel for implementing a dangerous policy on the Temple Mount that is liable to lead to a conflagration.

Yet, reality, as always, is a bit more complicated. The status quo in the plaza surrounding the Al-Aqsa Mosque has in fact not changed since 2003. The entry of Jews and tourists is permitted on the Temple Mount from 7:30 to 10 A.M., and from 12:30 to 1:30 P.M. These visits do not have to be coordinated with officials of the Waqf (Muslim trust) and take place without any interference. Indeed, last Thursday, for example, the area was totally calm. At 1 P.M., dozens of tourists could be seen wandering around the plaza.

The advent of the holiday season in Israel, combined with the desire of Palestinian politicians to win a few minutes of fame, has recently led, however, to various violent incidents.

At present, the PA is not doing enough to ease tensions, while the Islamic Movement's northern faction is apparently working in concert with a number of Palestinian figures in an effort to spark an escalation of hostilities on the mount.

In the past, revenues generated by the tourist visits there; which reached some \$200,000 per month; were transferred to the Waqf, which is run by Jordanian authorities. Since the outbreak of the second intifada, however, there has been no coordination of visits with the Waqf, and in 2003, Israel unilaterally opened the Temple Mount to tourists.

Sheikh Azzam Al-Khatib, the head of the Waqf, said that just before Yom Kippur, a number of Jewish groups distributed notices announcing that they planned to visit the Temple Mount on the eve of the holiday. In response, the former mufti of Jerusalem, Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, called on Muslim worshipers to gather at Al-Aqsa Mosque last Sunday, to defend it against the Jews. His call was also taken up by Hatem Abdel Khader, the Fatah official who holds the Jerusalem portfolio, and other factions belonging to the Islamic Movement.

After morning prayers that day, some 200 people gathered at the square waiting for the Jews to enter.

"The police knew about this," Al-Khatib said. "One of the officers who is responsible for police coordination with the Waqf, called me and I warned him not to open the Temple Mount to Jewish worshippers."

At 7:30 A.M., the Mughrabim Gate was opened and a group of tourists entered the compound. Muslims began hurling stones at them and at the police officers who tried to hurry the tourists away from the scene.

Sunday, however, it seemed as if the appropriate conclusions had been drawn: After learning that dozens of Muslims planned to await the arrival of "extremist Jews" at the Temple Mount, the police decided that the entire area would remain closed to non-Muslim visitors.

23. Islamic leader tells Haaretz: Temple Mount clashes won't end until occupation of Jerusalem does

By Liel Kyzer, Barak Ravid and Jack Khoury, *Haaretz*, 6/10/2009

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1119115.html>

An Israel Defense Forces soldier and a Border Police officer were lightly injured on Monday on the second day of clashes between police and Palestinian protesters in East Jerusalem.

The soldier, a Military Police officer, was stabbed in the neck and lightly wounded near the Shuafat checkpoint. The perpetrator, a 16-year-old from the nearby village of Anata, was held for questioning. The Border Police officer was injured by stones hurled by rioters near Shuafat refugee camp, where seven demonstrators were detained. Approximately 50 protesters have been detained since the clashes began Sunday.

Despite the heightened tension in the city, tens of thousands of Jewish worshippers gathered at the Old City's Western Wall Plaza to participate in the recitation of the traditional priestly blessing performed on Sukkot and other major holidays. The ceremony proceeded without incident, but earlier in the day Palestinians hurled stones at ultra-Orthodox visitors to the Mount of Olives.

Police also dispersed around 150 Palestinians who had blocked the road next to the Rockefeller Archaeological Museum in East Jerusalem, refusing to budge.

Jerusalem District police discovered a number of wheelbarrows next to the Al-Aqsa Mosque filled with stones and cinder blocks, which officers said protesters had

planned to hurl at both security forces and Jewish worshippers praying at the Western Wall.

The upgraded state of alert in the Old City will continue today, out of concern that the protesters will answer the call aired by the heads of Hamas and the Islamic Movement in Israel to arrive at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound to "protect" the area, which sits atop the Temple Mount.

Jerusalem police said Monday that only Muslim worshippers over the age of 50 would be allowed entry to the mount, in an effort to prevent further disturbances.

Despite the Palestinian Authority's calls for the international community to protest Israel's "provocations" on the Temple Mount, the U.S. administration has not issued any statements of concern to the government in Jerusalem. A State Department briefing Monday did not refer to the issue either.

Senior Foreign Ministry officials, however, on Monday briefed their counterparts at the U.S. embassy in Israel about the disturbances - which they said were not Israel's doing, but "provocation" on the part of Islamic extremists.

Public Security Minister Yitzhak Aharonovitch and Police Commissioner David Cohen toured the Temple Mount Monday during a security assessment, and announced that they would "take steps" in the coming days against Sheikh Ra'ad Salah, head of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement.

Salah told Haaretz on Monday that the clashes would last as long as Israel's "occupation" of the city and Al-Aqsa Mosque continued. He said the Israeli government must understand that using force does not grant it rights to Al-Aqsa Mosque or anywhere else in East Jerusalem, and that the key to achieving calm in the area is an Israeli "withdrawal."

"No one has rights to the Al-Aqsa Mosque other than the Muslims. The mosque compound is Muslim, Palestinian and Arab, and Israel has no rights to the mosque or East Jerusalem," he said.

Salah has been prohibited from entering the Temple Mount area for several months, and has been staying at a nearby residence while following developments. The Islamic Movement leader reiterated his call for Arabs within Israel's Green Line and in Jerusalem to protest beside the mount to "protect Al-Aqsa from the infiltration of extremist Jewish elements."

24. Third Intifada?

THE JERUSALEM POST, 5/10/2009, Editorial

<http://www.jpost.com /servlet/Satellite?cid=1254756248068&pagename=JPArticle%2FShowFull>

For a few hours yesterday, it looked like Palestinian leaders were about to unleash a third intifada. That they didn't is perhaps attributable to a recognition that centrally-planned terrorism - drive-by shootings, bus bombings, the slaughter of children in pizza shops - is now as passé as their previous tactic of airline hijackings. Still, there's plenty of room for spontaneous violence, inspired though not coordinated from above. The special priestly blessings of the Succot festival which brought tens of thousands of worshipers to the Western Wall culminated without incident. Still, the joy of the occasion was somewhat lessened by the palpable tension of threatened Arab violence. The background: Prior to Yom Kippur, the head of the Muslim Wakf learned that a fringe group of Jews planned a visit to the Temple Mount. They are harmless enough - part of a stream within the milieu that wants to establish a Third Temple on the site of the Dome of the Rock and reinstate animal sacrifices.

Generations of Jewish scholars have studied the practices and rituals of our ancient Temples, praying that one day the Messiah would deliver the Jews, and that God's presence would be manifested for all. But the group in question has busied itself with stitching the garments and crafting the sacramental objects the Israelite priests will "soon" need.

Police learned that the Wakf was bothered, and preemptively barred the Third Temple group from the plateau. But as police opened the area to other visitors, escorting a group of mostly French Christians to the Mount, waiting Muslim youths unleashed a barrage of projectiles. The police rescued the tourists and arrested some of the rioters, but the atmosphere in and around Jerusalem's Old City remained tense.

CURIOUSLY, Ramadan passed with nary a disruption. Indeed, Israeli authorities took various measures to facilitate the unfettered observance of the holy month in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza also. Too bad, then, that Palestinian leaders could not find it in their hearts to reciprocate by allowing the Jews to observe Jewish holy days in tranquility.

But, really, that is comparing apples and oranges. Israeli authorities foster coexistence and maintain free access to the holy sites. Palestinian factions, by contrast, want just the opposite. Jews do not deny the religious significance of the Muslim sites on the Temple Mount. Yet Palestinians can't abide the fact that the Jewish presence in Jerusalem antedated the Muslim arrival in 636 CE by well over a millennia.

No one knows why the Palestinians decided to stir things up just now. Some suggest it was part of an effort by Mahmoud Abbas to distract his people from the Palestinian Authority's unpopular decision not to further exploit the Goldstone Report at this time. Whatever the reason, this much is clear: nothing brings Fatah in Ramallah, Hamas in Gaza City, and the Islamic Movement's Northern Branch in the Galilee more into harmony than "protecting" the *Haram al-Sharif* from - in the words of the PLO news agency WAFA - "radical Jew colonizers."

Sadly, not one Palestinian leader is willing to tell his people that, of course, there was a Jewish temple where the Aksa Mosque stands today. To admit a Jewish civilizational connection would demand that Palestinians agree to share the area and to treat Jewish holy places with respect. It would turn upside down a Palestinian political culture that has socialized generations to think of Jews as interlopers. And this neither Fatah's Abbas, nor Hamas's Ismail Haniyeh nor the Islamic Movement's Sheikh Raed Salah will ever do.

SINCE the liberation of Jerusalem in 1967, the Jews have been magnanimous in victory. Not only have they permitted Muslims to retain administrative control over their holy places, Israeli authorities have forbidden Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount.

The Israel Police restricts visits by non-Muslims to 7:30-10:30 a.m. and 12:30-1:30 p.m. and bars them entirely on Muslim holidays. To appease Muslim sensibilities, since 2006, successive Israeli governments have forbidden the Antiquities Authority from blocking illegal Palestinian excavations below Temple Mount. And invariably, when Arabs threaten violence, it is the Jews who are barred from the site to reduce tensions.

So while Israel's "Third Temple" fanatics are carefully policed and marginalized by mainstream society, the Palestinian leadership continues to mainstream fanatical ideas about Jews - making reconciliation unreachable.