

## Jerusalem - 1948, 1967, 2000: Setting the Record Straight

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Many media reports on the Camp David negotiations and the question of Jerusalem contain fundamental inaccuracies on the recent history of Jerusalem. Media reports on East Jerusalem noted that this area was captured by Israel from Jordan during the 1967 war, without reference to the status of this city between 1948 and 1967. (For example, according to the New York Times ("Camp David Talks at Crucial Point", July 24 2000), "the Israelis pushed the Jordanians out of East Jerusalem in 1967.") The continuing impact of the 1948-1967 period is central to understanding the nature of the Israeli debate and policy, and explains the public opinion polls showing the likely rejection of agreements that re-divide this city or are based on shared sovereignty. The following short summary is designed to set the record straight.

1) The 1948 War and the Capture of the Jewish Quarter Jewish Jerusalem was a primary target of the attack following the departure of the British forces and the Israeli Declaration of Independence on May 15 1948. Between the fighting that began following the UN Partition Resolution on November 27 1947, Arab forces had blocked the access road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and numerous Israeli efforts to end this blockade failed, with significant casualties. As a result, there were few reinforcements, and on May 28, the Arab Legion completed the capture of the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, which was the site of numerous ancient synagogues and the Western Wall of the Temple, destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 AD. (These were and remain the holiest sites in the Jewish religion.) The Legion's commander, Abdallah el-Tal, recalled that "The operations of calculated destruction were set in motion... Only four days after our entry into Jerusalem the Jewish Quarter had become a graveyard." (Abdallah el-Tal, Disaster of Palestine, Cairo 1959) The Jews that survived surrendered and were forced to leave their homes.

2) The Systematic Desecration of the Jewish holy places After the Jewish Quarter was captured, the destruction, desecration and systematic looting of Jewish sites continued. 57 ancient synagogues, libraries and centers of religious study were ransacked and 12 were totally and deliberately destroyed. Those that remained standing were defaced, used for housing of both people and animals. Appeals were made to the United Nations and in the international community to declare the Old City to be an 'open city' and stop this destruction, but there was no response. This condition continued until

Jordan lost control of Jerusalem in June 1967. (Terence Prittie, *Whose Jerusalem?* Frederick Muller Limited London 1981; Peter Schneider and Geoffrey Wigoder, *Jerusalem Perspectives* 1976 .)

In addition, thousands of tombstones from the ancient cemetery on the Mount of Olives were used as paving stones for roads and as construction material in Jordanian army camps. After the 1967 war, Israelis who visited the cemetery on Mt. of Olives and saw the desecrated graves and smashed gravestones noted "that Jordanian soldiers and local residents had helped themselves to the stones to use as building materials." Graves were broken into pieces or used as flagstones, steps, or building materials. In 1967, graves were found open with the bones scattered. Parts of the cemetery were converted into parking lots, a filling station, and an asphalt road was built to cut through it. The Intercontinental Hotel was built at the top of the cemetery. Sadar Khalil, appointed by the Jordanian govt. as the official caretaker of the cemetery, built his home on the grounds using the stones robbed from graves to build it. In 1967, the press published extensive photos in which Jewish gravestones were found in Jordanian army camps, such as El Azariya, as well as in Palestinian walkways, steps, and pavement.

3) Violation of the 1949 Armistice Agreement When the war ended, and negotiations began, the Israeli representatives emphasized regaining access to Jewish Jerusalem. Article VIII of the Israel-Jordan Armistice Agreement, signed on 3 April 1949, called for the establishment of a Special Committee, "composed of two representatives of each Party for the purpose of formulating agreed plans " including "free access to the Holy Places and cultural institutions and use of the cemetery on the Mount of Olives". As a result, Israeli press reports noted that "There is a good chance that roads to the Holy Places will be opened so that Jews may be able to go to the Wailing Wall this Passover. The problem of access to the Holy Places has been left to the local military authorities to arrange, and there seems to be enough goodwill on both sides to make this possible."

This did not take place, and these clauses of the Armistice Agreement were never honored. Promises continued to be made, and Glubb Pasha (the British commander of the Arab Legion (check for exact title) pledged that "Jerusalem's Arab and Jewish populations would be two separate cities 'with free trade and exchange between each other.' The Arabs would be perfectly willing to allow the Jews to have access to their shrines, notably the Wailing Wall, now inside the Arab-held Old City." Although there were numerous discussions of this issue, and Israeli complaints, the Jordanians refused to

honor the agreement, and the UN did not pass any resolutions against this treatment of Jewish religious institutions.

In 1954, the head of the British delegation to the World Congress asked General Vagn Bennike, U.N. Chief of Staff, to convey a request to permit a small group composed primarily of American and British citizens "to cross into the Old City to offer prayers at the Western (Wailing) Wall". Similar requests were addressed to American officials. In response to one such request, Assistant U.S. Secretary of State Henry A. Byroade cited the "unfortunate tension" between Israel and Jordan, a "practical arrangement can not be worked out". In 1956, Maj.-Gen, E. L. M. Burns, Chief of Staff of the U.N. Truce Supervision Organization, was also asked to raise the issue of Article VIII violations and free access to the Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem with the Jordanians and their British mentors. The United Nations was of no assistance in this issue, and ignored the discrimination and violations of the Armistice Agreement. Although debates on the now defunct internationalization of Jerusalem continued, there was no mention of the inaccessibility of Jewish holy sites. The Vatican also ignored requests to intervene in order to allow Jews to visit their religious sites.

In presentations before UN bodies, Abba Eban pointed out that although the Christian and Moslem Holy Places were freely accessible to Moslem and Christian worshippers, "the Wailing Wall, the most hallowed sanctuary of Judaism and the most ancient shrine in the entire city is barred to all access by worshippers despite solemn agreements and undertakings." In the Knesset, Israeli political leaders decried the fact that "This abomination had not shocked the world, which was so steeped in materialism that there would soon be no room left for the very concept of holiness." On occasion, Jews were caught and detained when they attempted to cross the cease-fire line that divided the city, in order to pray at the Western Wall.

Every year, on Tisha b'Av, the High Holidays, and during the three pilgrimage holidays, the Israeli press, as well as political and religious leaders, recalled the fact that Article 8 of the Armistice Agreement was systematically violated, and urged the Israeli government "to show more activity in this matter". Periodically, public groups renewed the appeal to the UN, the U.S., and the "great powers" to intervene and force Jordan to honor the commitments of Article 8, and end its refusal to allow religious Jews access to the Wailing Wall, "the most holy relic recognized by the Jewish religion."