

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
August 3, 2017



Please note: Opinions expressed in the following articles do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

Read previous weeks' Middle East Notes at

<http://maryknollogc.org/tag/middle-east-notes>

Note: The next issue of the Middle East Notes will be circulated in three weeks on August 24 after a brief summer holiday.

The four featured articles and the related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes continue to focus on the recently settled Temple Mount/ Haram al Sharif conflict. Odeh Bisharat writes of the success of the Palestinians non-violent response. Danny Seidemann gives a detailed presentation of the issues, history and background the recent conflict. The NGO Ir Amim presents a primer to help make sense of the rapidly spiraling events that created this conflict. David B. Green presents some of the real and mythical history of this holy site. Links to two CMEP Bulletins, other articles of interest and recommended web sites for contemporary and reliable information on the Temple Mount crisis and the ongoing Israeli/Palestinian conflict are also provided

Commentary: To quote from the NGO Irim: "Jerusalem in general, and the Sacred Esplanade – to use the neutral terminology employed by the ecumenical team of editors and writers of 'Where Heaven and Earth Meet' (principal editors Oleg Grabar and Benjamin Z. Kedar) – in particular, is of central symbolic significance to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. And it's hardly a coincidence, considering that first Christianity and then Islam built upon the traditions of their predecessors and claimed to supersede them. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the stories all three of these monotheistic faiths tell about the Mount."

A question and challenge to all believers is what this conflict concerning a holy place reveals about their varied relationships to the one and same God of all creation, of the Universe, of our solar system, of our one earth. Most of us believe that all religions are but pathways for our approach to God. We have never been successful in dictating how, where, through whom and what our loving God comes to us.

Featured articles:

- Odeh Bisharat writes in *Haaretz* that when tens of thousands of Palestinians decide to resist peacefully, it sends an important message. All the Palestinians did was to restore the situation at the Al-Aqsa compound in Jerusalem without violence.
- Through Americans for Peace Now (APN), Danny Seidemann, an attorney and world-renowned Jerusalem expert, provides the answers to the tough questions concerning the issues, history and background of Jerusalem's Temple Mount/ Haram al Sharif.
- Ir Amim ("City of Nations" or "City of Peoples") focuses on Jerusalem within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In *+972 Resources* this NGO has created a primer to help make sense of the rapidly spiraling events that created the recent Temple Mount crisis.
- David B. Green in *Haaretz* answers the question, "What makes the Temple Mount/ Haram al Sharif so important to Jews and Muslims anyway?" with some of the real and mythical history of this holy site.

1) [Opinion The Palestinians Learn From History, Odeh Bisharat, Haaretz, July 31, 2017](#)

“How uncharitable! The Palestinians finally get a little joy, and the Israeli right went off the rails with rage. Guys, what’s up? After all, you won innumerable wars, every other day you’re burning the consciousness of some Palestinian town or village; humiliating women, children and old people at checkpoints and explaining to children in their beds in the middle of the night exactly who’s in charge. Why so much envy of the Palestinians?”

“All the Palestinians did was to restore the situation at the Al-Aqsa compound in Jerusalem. Don’t Palestinians deserve to have a brief respite from their daily suffering in every place? What’s more, during the festivities at Al-Aqsa, furious soldiers — sitting at a higher level — didn’t miss the opportunity to toss a stun grenade into the crowd that filled the plaza; they have to remind the Palestinians who’s the boss and who has the monopoly on victories.

“But still, here is some advice to our astonished friends on the right: Save your anger for the days yet to come, when the settlements will be dismantled and we really will have two states, not the bluff of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.” ...

“On the other hand, we can say that although the struggle was over a religious symbol, that symbol also turned into a national symbol that unites all Palestinian and the Arabs and democrats in general. But even as a religious symbol, it turned out that the way to succeed in the battle over it was to engage in civil disobedience, which attracts masses of people, including women, the elderly and children.

“At the start of the events there was an Israeli attempt to draw the Palestinians into a violent struggle that employed guns. It happened when the security forces killed four young men during the demonstrations. The Palestinians refused to enter the bloody trap and continued with their *‘salmiyah’* (“peaceful” in Arabic) policy.

“Seems that Palestinians do learn from history.”

2) [Tough Questions, Expert Answers, Danny Seidemann, APN, July 24, 2017](#)

Contents: Click on each question to read the answer.

- [Since things heated up again in and around the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif, there has been a lot of talk about the "Status Quo." Why is this the case?](#)
- [The term "Status Quo" implies a situation that is unchanging, but you say there have been changes in the Status Quo over the past 48 years. Can you explain what you mean?](#)
- [Can you be more specific?](#)
- [So the big question is: what is the Status Quo?](#)
- [OK, with that in mind, what is the closest thing to a non-controversial, consensus definition of the Status Quo?](#)
- [Working from that definition, what are the key elements of the Status Quo?](#)
- [How have access and entry changed over the years?](#)
- [What about access/entry for non-Muslims?](#)
- [Did any of this change with the 2014 and 2015 Amman Understandings?](#)
- [What about less visible elements of the Status Quo, like overall authority?](#)
- [What about coordination between Israel, the Waqf, and Jordan on matters related to the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif?](#)

- [What about security at the site?](#)
 - [Who decides when to open and close the site?](#)
 - [The 2014 Amman understandings also dealt with security matters. Can you explain this?](#)
 - [What about the 2015 Amman understandings?](#)
 - [What is the PA's role on the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif?](#)
 - [Who is in charge of Maintenance & Archeology at the site?](#)
 - [What happened in 1996?](#)
 - [How have things been since that time?](#)
 - [Rhetoric seems to play a huge part in stoking tensions around the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif. Can you talk a little about that?](#)
 - [In addition to the Amman Understandings of 2014 and 2015, what can/should be done to preserve/restore/calibrate the Status Quo, and prevent future eruptions of violence centered on the site?](#)
 - [Any final thoughts?](#)
- 3) [Everything you need to know about tensions at Jerusalem's holiest site ,Ir Amim +972 Resources, July 20, 2017](#)**

“Over the last week a series of escalating events on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif has threatened peace and security at the holy site and for Jerusalem as a whole. Ir Amim has created the following primer to help make sense of these rapidly spiraling events and to raise the call for a swift, agreed resolution of the current conflict.

The catalyst

“The current escalation of events at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif compound (also known as Al Aqsa compound, the Noble Sanctuary, the Esplanade, the compound) began last Friday (July 14) with a heinous attack that claimed the lives of two Israeli police officers. The three perpetrators, who descended from the compound, fled back to the Mount, where they were shot and killed by security forces. The government then issued orders to close the compound entirely for two consecutive days.” ...

...“The anomalous closure of Al-Aqsa for two consecutive days may largely be interpreted as a security measure for Israelis. For Palestinians, it is a severe abridgment of their religious rights and an upending of the status quo.

The status quo

“The status quo in place since 1967 concerns management and security arrangements on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif that were recognized in the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994. Three critical considerations are: 1) the primacy of Muslim prayer rights, e.g. over the right of Jews to visit the site; 2) the division of management authority, which stipulates the Muslim Waqf (religious trust) will manage the inside of the compound and its holy sites while Israel maintains authority for security around the perimeter; and 3) entry arrangements.” ...

“According to the Waqf, entry arrangements are a key element of status quo arrangements at the holy site; therefore any change to these arrangements should be considered as a change to the status quo.”...

Metal detectors

“What Israelis may see as a conventional case of security screening is perceived by Palestinians as an expansion of Israeli control over the compound and a change in the status quo: instead of having the Waqf decide who will enter the Mount, as it has done since 1967, the authority has passed into the hands of Israeli security forces. The Palestinians, who equate barriers and checkpoints as a symbol of occupation, are unable to tolerate what they experience as an infringement on their unimpeded entry into their holy site and the oppression that symbolizes.”...

4) [**The Real - and Mythical - History of the Temple Mount: What makes this holy site so important to Jews and Muslims anyway?, David B. Green, Haaretz, July 24, 2017**](#)

“In an essay he wrote for the scholarly anthology ‘Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem’s Sacred Esplanade,’ the Muslim Palestinian philosopher Sari Nusseibeh makes the point that it couldn’t have been the Prophet Mohammed’s night journey to al-Haram al-Sharif – what the Jews call the Temple Mount – that bestowed holiness on that spot: ‘rather, Muhammad’s visit must have been made because of the spot’s already-existing sanctity.’

“One needn’t be a nonbeliever to acknowledge that Jerusalem in general, and the Sacred Esplanade – to use the neutral terminology employed by the ecumenical team of editors and writers of ‘Where Heaven and Earth Meet’ (principal editors Oleg Grabar and Benjamin Z. Kedar) – in particular, is of central symbolic significance to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. And it’s hardly a coincidence, considering that first Christianity and then Islam built upon the traditions of their predecessors and claimed to supersede them. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the stories all three of these monotheistic faiths tell about the Mount.”...

“The turn of the Jews came only in 1967, with the Six-Day War and the unification of the divided city under Israeli rule. In general, Israel’s policy has been one of religious tolerance and openness. When Israeli authorities closed the Temple Mount to Muslim worshippers for two days after the July 14 killing of two Border Policemen there, it was the first time they had done so since 1969. But the question of who’s in charge has been a sensitive one – an extreme understatement – since the day in June 1967 that an Israel Defense Forces soldier raised an Israeli flag over Al-Aqsa Mosque, only to have Defense Minister Moshe Dayan order it removed minutes later.

“In such a situation, it is not surprising that there is little room for magnanimity, with each side on constant alert for any change in the status quo and any sign that the other side is gradually encroaching on its position. Any backing down is interpreted by both publics as a sign of weakness. Infinitesimally small actions can set off a conflict whose stakes will be unthinkable high.”

See also:

[Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative helped resolve Temple Mount standoff](#)

[As Israel reopens all gates, worshipers enter Al-Aqsa for first time in nearly two weeks](#)

5) **Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins**

- July 21, 2017 – [CMEP \[Bulletin\] Jerusalem Status Quo?](#)
- July 28, 2017 – [CMEP \[Bulletin\] Congress' Anti-Boycott Act Threatens More Than Free Speech](#)

[Click here for other excellent sources of information and links to articles concerning the State of Israel and the Palestinian people.](#)