

Islam and Jerusalem

Why is the Muslim world up in arms against Jerusalem being declared the capital of Israel? After all, Jerusalem is made up of different areas, just as Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, Manhattan, and Staten Island are all part of New York City. The part of Jerusalem that contains the Knesset and is the administrative heart of Israel is located on land that has been part of the state since 1948, quite separate from the Old City and lands conquered from Jordan in 1967. There is no logical reason why Palestine, if it ever gets around to wanting a state of its own enough to compromise, should not declare its capital at Abu Dis, a suburb to the east, and calling it Jerusalem too. The fuss is clearly not about Jerusalem, itself, but something else. I know full well that whatever I say will be ignored or denied by those with a different agenda. But, still, for the record.

The religious reason given for Muslim opposition is that the Old City of Jerusalem is a holy city for Islam and the Al-Aqsa Mosque is the place Muhammad visited in a dream. Jerusalem is not mentioned in the Quran, and a Mosque was not built on the Temple site until almost a hundred years after Muhammad. The Al-Aqsa, incidentally, is not and was not the golden-domed mosque, as the world in general seems to think. That one was known as Omar's and built in 691. Al-Aqsa, the less impressive one, was built in 705. But Muslim interest in Jerusalem as a holy city only began in response to the Crusaders, who called Jerusalem their holy city, because they believed Jesus had been buried in the Holy Sepulcher there. In reality the holy cities of Islam under Muhammad were Mecca and Medina.

Just as we have a Written Torah and an Oral Torah, Islam has the Quran and the Hadith. It is the Hadith, compiled over several hundred years after the prophet, that mentions a holy city in addition to Mecca and Medina and claims that Jerusalem was the one that contained a holy mosque. Many scholars dispute this, because there was no mosque in Jerusalem until long after Muhammad died. They argue that the third Mosque was in Yemen, at a place called al-Maqdis that did have an early Mosque. Because al-Maqdis, sounds like Mikdash, the Hebrew for the Holy Place, the tradition was created to associate the name with the Jerusalem Temple. But it was essentially a move to compete with the Christians rather than the Jews. There is no tradition in the Quran or the Hadith of praying for Jerusalem. So, if it is not as important as either Mecca or Medina, why do they make such a fuss?

There is another issue. All the area conquered by the Muslims under Muhammad, Omar, and the Umayyad dynasty are considered Islamic territory, Dar al-Islam, the World of Islam. Anyone living there had to accept Islam as the supreme authority and resign themselves to being Dhimmis. Christians and Jews, who could live there, were required to pay a tax to Islam, the Jizya. The stated aim of Islam was to reconquer all such territory, including Spain. Returning to Al-Andalus remains a common theme of jihadis. They also want to reclaim the land in Europe they once held when, at the height of Islamic expansion, they reached Budapest and Vienna.

Therefore Jews living in Muslim territory, having self-determination and freedom from Islamic rule and the Jizya, is a slap in their face, and ultimately it is a matter of honor and religion to try to reclaim it all for Islam. Yet the Quran says that Allah or God gave the land to Moses and his people.

"Pharaoh sought to scare them [the Israelites] out of the land [of Israel]: but We [Allah] drowned him [Pharaoh] together with all who were with him. Then We [Allah] said to the Israelites: 'Dwell in this land [the Land of Israel]. When the promise of the hereafter [End of Days] comes to be fulfilled, We [Allah] shall assemble you [the Israelites] all together [in the Land of Israel]."

"We [Allah] have revealed the Qur'an with the truth... We have sent you [Muhammed] forth only to proclaim good news and to give warning."

(Quran 17:100-104, "The Night Journey")

Yet the Islamic world of today denies this. The use of violence, which is permitted by the Hadith to recover lost territory, ignores the Quran itself when applied to Israel. Although the Quran does not say it, the Hadith does say that it is a religious requirement to kill Jews and that Jews are an inferior people, comparing them to monkeys and pigs.

Originally Muslims had always allowed the Jews to live in the Old City. Only the Crusaders massacred the Jews and drove them out. So why did Islam suddenly change? When Jordan conquered the Old City in 1948, it destroyed the synagogues and the Jewish Quarter and forbade Jews to enter the Old City. Clearly as a response to the creation of Israel. Pride. Pride and honor play an important part in Islamic culture. Muslims were told that theirs is the only true faith, and their conquests proved it. All subjected peoples had to accept their inferiority. That was why Jews under Islam had to dress differently, could not ride horses or build buildings higher, and had to pay the tax. Under Shia Islam, they could not go out in the rain, because they might contaminate the Muslims, and could not put money into a Muslim's hand for similar reasons. Until pressure in the early 20th century, a Muslim killing a Jew was given no sentence, but a Jew killing a Muslim even accidentally was put to death.

The idea of an inferior people standing up to Muslim power was an affront and a repudiation of Islamic power and honor. But the greatest humiliation of all is the reminder that barely 14 Million Jews are standing up to nearly two billion Muslims. This can only be explained as the work of the Devil and Jews must be the agents of evil!

The rise of Arab nationalism claimed the whole of the Middle East and refused to concede any Jewish self-determination. Emir Faisal actually met Chaim Weizmann in 1919 and reached an agreement. But Arab nationalists vetoed it. The use of violence as a political tool began with the Arab riots of 1922.

The argument that the Western Powers were imperialists might have been true when it came to breaking up the Ottoman Empire. But Jews had been living in the Middle East from before Islam began. In 1948 most Jews in the world lived in Muslim lands and spoke Arabic. The reaction to Israeli Independence was to expel Jews from almost every Muslim land they lived in. Hatred of Israel, then, had nothing to do with settlements or its capital. It was against their very existence as an independent entity. The only Arab leader prepared to accommodate Israel at the time was King Abdullah of Jordan, who was assassinated in 1951. So was President Sadat for making peace. (So was Rabin!)

Although many moderate Muslims reject these extremes, the simple populace—ignorant, whipped up by fanatics, and paid to demonstrate—have become accustomed to anti-Semitic ideas, and the constant preaching of hatred by many (not all) Imams and Mullahs around the Muslim world only inflames feelings. Sympathy for the Palestinians is understandable. We Jews would sympathize and support any Jewish community we felt was being mistreated. Why shouldn't Muslims? One cannot expect neutrality. There are two conflicting narratives, conflicting worldviews that I cannot see being solved. Even without the conflicting stories and lies, there are two extremes—left and right—that even in so-called peaceful countries like the USA cannot be resolved.

I do not want to negate Israeli mistakes, mistreatments, or the evils of occupation. But each side has its polemics. And if the overwhelming worldview, as expressed in the United Nations, is against Israel and against its history, why shouldn't I argue for my people first? To claim that Israel is committing genocide is a joke, because both within Israel and on the West Bank, the Palestinian Arab population has been growing, not shrinking! If Israel has such a powerful and efficient army, how come it is so incompetent, failing so abysmally to achieve its supposed aim of killing off Palestinians? The argument of imperialism and colonialism is a joke. The biggest imperialists and colonialists over the past millennium have been Arabs and Muslims themselves. If their governments, years and years after independence, are still corrupt and inefficient, not to say murderous, who is to blame for that, if not themselves?

Recognizing Israel's right to name its own capital is the first step in stopping the policy of appeasement. The US has not said the Palestinians cannot also have their capital in East Jerusalem. Israel's capital anyway is located in the West, in pre-1967 borders, which everyone agrees would be part of a final peace settlement. Israel has guaranteed access to everyone and has since 1967. In 1947 the Arab world rejected the UN Resolution partitioning Palestine AND making Jerusalem an international city. They refused the Allon Plan after the Six Day War, exchanging the West Bank and East Jerusalem for peace at the Arab League Conference in Khartoum.

They will argue that Israel has never negotiated in good faith and that the conditions offered fell short of what they could expect. Yet in fact Israel has withdrawn from Sinai, from Gaza. Treaties with Jordan and Egypt have held up and been honored in spirit more by Israel than the Arabs.

This week Abbas has admitted for the first time in public that he believes the Jews have no claim whatsoever to Jerusalem or Israel—recorded and available to everyone, instead of his usual policy of saying one thing to his home audience and another to the world. The policy of treating the Palestinians as special is like spoiling a child. UNRWA has consistently supported anti-Israel rhetoric and material. It encourages dependency. The more given, the more expected. It is time to stop appeasement and negotiate honestly, face to face, without an army of supporters behind the scenes urging them to hold out for more. Their suffering pains me, and if I would see any move in that direction, I would feel much happier about excoriating Israel should it refuse to make the concessions necessary for peaceful coexistence.