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January 10, 2023



## Arabs' false pretext for violence: Jews altering Temple Mount's "status quo"

Dear Friend of Israel, Friend of FLAME:

Early last Tuesday morning, new Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir took a quiet, 13-minute stroll around the periphery of the Temple Mount, no doubt noting the al-Aqsa Mosque, as he has done many times in the past. He left as peacefully as he came.

Immediately, however, Hamas, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority falsely accused Ben-Gvir of provocation and altering the much vaunted “status quo” of the Mount.

Indeed, the overwhelming majority of claims that Israel is changing conditions on the Temple Mount are pure fabrications used to excuse violence against the Jewish state and its citizens. In fact, when Arabs accuse Israel of violating the status quo on the Mount, they really mean Jews should not be able to access the site at all.

*Status quo* here refers to an unwritten agreement between Israel and the Islamic Waqf, which administers Muslim holy places on the Mount, following the reunification of Jerusalem in the 1967 Six Day War.

Jordan's ruler, King Abdullah II, recently warned Israel against crossing "red lines" by attempting to change the status quo on the Temple Mount.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority (PA) declared that any attempt by Israel to alter the status quo would amount to a “declaration of war”.

Such statements by the Jordanians and Palestinians reek of hypocrisy , considering that it is they, not Israel, who have made extensive changes to the status quo. The Islamic Waqf itself has made significant structural changes, and has also severely restricted Jewish access to the site.

When Israeli forces captured the Temple Mount in 1967, the Jewish people

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gained sovereignty over the holiest site in Judaism for the first time in two millennia.

Jeremiah Rozman at the MirYam Institute noted in an article in the American-Jewish newspaper, *The Algemeiner*, that the Israelis could have completely Judaized the site, the same way the Ottoman Turks turned Hagia Sophia into a mosque following their conquest of Constantinople. But they didn't.

Instead, Moshe Dayan, the Israeli Minister of Defense at the time, ordered the Israeli flag removed from the Mount, then undertook negotiations with the Islamic Waqf to prevent a religious war with the Muslim world.

Dayan's greatest mistake was disregarding the religious significance of the site for Jews, mistakenly believing that for the Jewish people, the Temple Mount was nothing more than "a historical site of commemoration of the past," whereas it was at that time a "Muslim prayer mosque."

Therefore, Dayan thought, "one should not hinder the Arabs behaving there as they now do and one should recognize their right as Muslims to control the site." Dayan's decision was aided by the fact that, at the time, the majority of both Haredi and religious Zionist rabbis believed religious law forbade Jews from entering the Temple Mount.

Under the terms of the status quo agreement, the Islamic Waqf would continue to administer the site. Most of the Waqf's employees are Palestinians, many of whom have ties to terrorist groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The flags of these groups and other terrorist organizations often appear on the Mount despite the status quo agreement forbidding flags on the site.

The status quo also prohibited Jews from praying on the Mount, but did *not* prevent them from visiting. The Israeli Police would provide security on the Mount, and Israeli sovereignty would apply to the site just as it did to the rest of Jerusalem following the reunification.

Whereas Israel has upheld the status quo, Muslims have not. For starters, the Islamic Waqf has overseen the construction of four new mosques on the Mount since 1967. Large parts of the Mount's plaza have been paved to serve as prayer space for Muslims.

The Waqf has also restricted Jewish access to the site by closing entry points to the Mount and restricting the times and days that Jews can visit the site. Israel has mostly stood by and allowed these changes.

In 1994, the Israeli-Jordanian peace agreement codified Jordan's status as the custodian of the Mount so that it would not be challenged by any other Arab actor.

One might ask, why is it so important for Jordan to control the Temple Mount? The answer, according to Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs analyst, Pinhas Inbari, is that the country's ruling family's legitimacy depends on it. "If they lose the Temple Mount to the Jews, they are finished," Inbari told *Israel Hayom*.

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Israel painstakingly tries to maintain the status quo on the Temple Mount, yet the international community, especially Jordan and the Palestinians, frequently accuse the Jewish state of violating it. In 2000, for example, the late Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon visited the Mount. His visit did not violate the status quo, as Jews are allowed to visit the site so long as they don't pray there.

Nevertheless, the Palestinians used this visit as pretext for launching a new campaign of terrorism—the Second Intifada, or the Al-Aqsa Intifada—which in fact had been pre-planned by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

The violent reactions and condemnations spurred by Jews visiting the Temple Mount are clear indications: It is *not* the status quo that offends so many, but rather the appearance of *any Jewish presence* on the site.

Simultaneously, there is now increasing desire on the part of some Israeli Jews for the right to pray on the Mount. Over the last five years, handfuls of Jews have prayed quietly and inconspicuously at the southeastern corner of the site, with apparent approval and supervision of the Israeli Police.

The Israeli Democracy Institute notes that 50% of Israeli Jews now support the right to pray on the Mount. Thus, Israel, as the nation-state of the Jewish people—and sovereign of the Mount—is justified in asserting greater rights to Judaism's holiest site.

Outrageously, much of the world rejects the importance of the Temple Mount to Jews. No surprise, then, that in 2021 the United Nations' General Assembly passed a resolution supported by 129 countries disavowing Judaism's connection to the site, and calling it only by its Muslim name, Haram Al-Sharif.

I urge you, when speaking with family, friends, colleagues—or in letters to the editor—to emphasize that the international community needs to acknowledge the sanctity of the Temple Mount to the Jewish people. It needs to approve Jews' moral and legal rights to worship there—the same rights now unjustly exercised exclusively by Muslims.

I hope you'll also take a minute, while you have this material front and center, to forward this message to friends, visit FLAME's lively Facebook page and review the P.S. immediately below. It describes FLAME's new *hasbarah* campaign—"Democracy Thrives in Israel"—which exposes false claims that Israel deprives Arab Israeli citizens and Palestinian Arabs of their rights.

Best regards,

James Sinkinson, Publisher  
Facts and Logic About the Middle East (FLAME)

P.S. Despite Israel's guarantee of civil liberties and equal treatment for all its citizens—including two million Arab Israelis—Israel is still falsely accused of being an apartheid state. Despite Israel and the Palestinians agreeing that the Palestinian Authority will administer its own civil

affairs, including elections, Israel is accused of violating human rights because Palestinians can't vote in Israeli elections. I think you'll agree that truth is the only antidote to this lie. FLAME's new hasbarah message—called “[Democracy Thrives in Israel](#)” publicizes a new, independent “Democracy Index” in which Israel is named the world's 23<sup>rd</sup> most successful democracy—ahead of the United States, Italy, Spain and 139 other nations. This new editorial message also clarifies that Palestinians' repression is due overwhelmingly to their two ruling dictatorships. (Palestinians are ranked #109 in the Democracy Index—as “authoritarian.”) I hope you'll review this convincing, fact-based editorial, which FLAME published nationwide in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *New York Post*, *Miami Herald*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times* and *San Jose Mercury News*. This piece will also be sent to all members of Congress, Vice President Harris and President Biden. If you agree that this kind of public relations effort on Israel's behalf is critical, I urge you to support us. Remember: FLAME's powerful ability to influence public opinion—and U.S. support of Israel—comes from individuals like you, one by one. I hope you'll consider giving a [donation](#) now, as you're able—with \$500, \$250, \$100, or even \$18. (Remember, your donation in 2022 to FLAME is tax deductible.) To donate online, just go to [donate now](#). Now, more than ever, we need your support to ensure that the American people, the U.S. Congress and President Biden stay committed to fighting antisemitic, anti-Israel actions by individuals, politicians and commercial companies.

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