

Jerusalem Is Ready to Explode - The World Can't Say It Wasn't Warned

The Palestinians have been abandoned, neglected and betrayed. Now their fate rests in the streets. It has always been this way

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Global Research, May 17, 2021

[Middle East Eye](#) 30 April 2021

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State &](#)

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Barely a month has passed since [Jared Kushner](#), former US President [Donald Trump](#)'s son-in-law and Middle East envoy, declared the Arab-Israeli conflict over.

Writing in the [Wall Street Journal](#), Kushner declared that “the political earthquake” unleashed by the latest [wave](#) of Arab normalisations with Israel wasn't over. Indeed, Kushner enthused, more than 130,000 Israelis had already visited Dubai since Trump hosted [the signing of the Abraham Accords](#) last September.

New friendly relations were flowering between Jews and Arabs. Just wait for the direct flights between Morocco and Israel. Saudi Arabia would soon be next. “We are witnessing the last vestiges of what has been known as the Arab-Israeli conflict,” Kushner wrote triumphantly.

No US figure has written anything so arrogant and been so wrong since President George W Bush landed on an aircraft carrier after the invasion of Iraq sporting the fateful banner: [“Mission Accomplished”](#). It was a claim [Iraqi IEDs](#) made US coalition soldiers swallow for many years thereafter.

Kushner regrets nothing. He knows he is right, because he has God on his side. But even among secular nationalists, Kushner is by no means alone in thinking that the seven-decade old conflict is over bar the shouting.

Minority rule

To be Israeli is to notch up one territorial victory after another – [the Golan Heights](#), East Jerusalem, the settlements around it, the Jordan Valley. Each year the state of Israel expands to inhabit a little bit more of the Land of Israel, the traditional Jewish name for territory that stretches far beyond the 1967 borders.

Israel has long since established itself as the only state between the river and the sea, one

increasingly incapable of tolerating any other political identity alongside it. This is their solution to the conflict, where the Jewish minority [rules over](#) an Arab majority.

To be Palestinian is to receive one blow after another – America’s [acceptance](#) of Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel; a new president in the White House who once [said](#) that if Israel did not exist, the US would have to invent it; the [headlong rush to invest in, and trade with, Israel](#) – even by Arab countries which have yet to recognise it.

Their own leadership is isolated and hopelessly divided. On Thursday, [Mahmoud Abbas](#), the Palestinian president, officially [postponed](#) the first elections in 15 years. Israel’s refusal to allow Jerusalemites to vote was the pretext for this. “As soon as Israel agrees [to let Palestinians vote in Jerusalem], we’ll hold the election within a week,” Abbas said in a televised speech. But, as everyone knows, the cause of this indefinite delay resides in the certain blow Abbas would receive if he did go to the polls. His party, Fatah, has [split into three lists](#), of which the list he heads is the least popular. Abbas’s search for a popular mandate is looking increasingly troubled.

So this is what the end of conflict looks like. It’s only a matter of time before the Palestinians see that their best interest lies in giving up, Kushner and the Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) calculate. Besides, the Palestinians already have a state of their own. It’s called Jordan.

In victory, the peril is greatest

All of which is dangerous make-believe. The project to establish Israel as a Jewish state has never been in more peril than it is now, when it thinks it is on the cusp of victory. For the real earthquake rumbling is not the one that signals an end of conflict, nor is it rumbling in the West Bank or Gaza. It is shaking Israel, in Jerusalem and in the territory it took in 1948.

It is between the Palestinians – who are either Israeli citizens or Jerusalemites – and the state itself, and it has Jerusalem at its centre. No wall or checkpoint will protect Israel from its consequences.

The following exchange between a Palestinian protester and a Jewish TV reporter was recorded in front of the Damascus Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem recently. “Where was your grandfather born?” asks the Palestinian. “Where my grandfather was born? In Morocco,” replied the Mizrahi presenter. “Not in this land, right? He was not here. And he did not come here before, right?”

“So, what do you mean?” “As for me, my grandfather and his father were born here.” “Do I have to return to Morocco? Is this what you mean?” The Palestinian answered: “This land is not for you... this land is not yours. Jerusalem is ours and it is Islamic.”

The spark for the confrontation was the decision to ban Palestinians from sitting in the courtyard and stairs in front of [Damascus Gate](#), where Palestinians used to sit after prayers at Al-Aqsa Mosque. The reason for the continued closure this year was [Covid-19](#), but this provoked outrage. “Did they perform the closure when there was Purim and Passover for the Jews? They must open the courtyard and stairs for us,” the demonstrators demanded.

Ethnic cleansing campaign

There are many more serious threats to their way of life, but the attempted closure of this area appeared to be [the last straw](#). Jerusalemites face an organised campaign of ethnic cleansing. They are either being forced to destroy houses built without planning permission, or they face expulsion from their homes. A fresh round of expulsions is set to take place in [Sheikh Jarrah](#) on 2 May, which could prove to be another spark for mass protest.

Over on the coast in Jaffa, [confrontations](#) between Palestinians and Israelis have another cause: the sale of so-called [absentee properties](#) to settlers. These are the properties in Jaffa whose Arab owners fled during [the Nakba](#) in 1948 and which are now occupied by Palestinian tenants with lifetime tenancy.

In 1948, the newly formed state of Israel expropriated these properties in Jaffa, which at the time [constituted 25 percent](#) of all the real estate in the country. For three years, Amidar, the Israeli state-owned housing company, has [offered](#) tenants the right to buy, but at prices they can not afford.

The sale has created an instant flashpoint. For weeks now, Palestinians in Jaffa have been gathering to demonstrate. Graffiti proclaiming “Jaffa is not for sale” has gone up in Arabic and Hebrew. The clear intention is to replace the city’s Arab population with Jewish settlers.

Clashes between police, settlers and Jaffa’s Palestinians took place after [two Palestinians from the al-Jarbo family](#), who are facing evictions from a residential building in the al-Ajami neighbourhood, reportedly [assaulted](#) the director of a Yeshiva, Rabbi Eliyahu Mali, as he attempted to view the property. Amidar is planning to expel Palestinian residents of the property and sell it to the rabbi, who wants to turn it into a synagogue.

Over in the northern city of [Umm al Fahm](#), and other Arab towns in the Northern Triangle and Galilee, there is yet another cause of protest. [Tens of thousands](#) of Palestinians have demonstrated against police inaction over armed gang violence for eight Fridays in a row. In each of these protests, the Palestinian flag has re-emerged. The chants are against the occupation, and yet this is all happening within the 1948 borders of Israel itself.

And so the mass chants go:

“Greetings from Umm Al-Fahm to our proud Jerusalem. O Zionist... can you hear? Closing the roads is on the way. Time revolves... and after night there will be day. From beneath the rubbles we rise... from beneath the destruction we are reborn. Paradise, paradise, paradise... remain safe O our homeland. Greetings from Um Al-Fahm to our proud Jerusalem.”

A new generation

The protesters are young, fearless and leaderless. Neither Fatah nor Hamas hold any sway here. All think of themselves not as citizens of Israel, but as Palestinians whose land and rights have been taken over by the Israeli state. They chant national Palestinian slogans.

Meanwhile in the Negev in the south, Israeli bulldozers have achieved something of a record. They have destroyed the same village, al-Araqib, [for the 186th time](#). The tension is a nationwide phenomenon. It is in the north, south, east and west. The epicentre of this spreading revolt is not Umm al Fahm or Jaffa. It is Jerusalem. Every dawn buses bring people from Palestinian towns from within 1948 borders to pray. They are called “Al-Murabitun”, [the protectors of Al-Aqsa](#).

The chant from Shafa Amr: "O Jerusalem do not shake... you are full of Arabism and might." From Jerusalem: "Forget about peacefulness... we want stones and rockets. O Aqsa we have come... and the police will not deter us."

These protestors are not uniformly motivated by religion nor are most of them socially conservative. Piece by piece, a national protest movement is forming, just as the First Intifada did, but this time it is not happening in the West Bank or Gaza but within Jerusalem and the 1948 borders of Israel itself.

A [new generation](#) is rediscovering the need to take to the streets. And a new axis is being formed. It is not pointing eastwards from Jerusalem to Ramallah, but west from Jerusalem to Jaffa. The security forces in Israel do not know how to react. According to Israeli daily Yedioth Aharonoth, there is dissension between various branches of the security forces on how to react.

Senior officials within the army and the intelligence services, the newspaper reported, have expressed "a professional disappointment in the conduct of the police within Jerusalem during the recent confrontations, for there was no sufficient preparation and dealing with the early events provoked emotions."

The paper said that the intelligence services warned the police against closing the stairs leading to Bab al-Amoud "because of the explosion it would cause in the region". The authorities gave way on the closure of the space in front of the Damascus Gate, to wild celebrations.

On the brink

There is fuel in the air. It will not take long before it finds another spark. Jerusalem is on the brink of an explosion.

Are Israel's international allies going to sit back and await the death and bloodshed that would inevitably accompany a fresh uprising? Joe Biden has embarked on a bid to restore US leadership by staking out a foreign policy allegedly based on support for human rights. His administration is the first in US history to [recognise](#) the Armenian genocide.

But if Biden actually wants to make a difference, it is not the past he should be talking about, but what is happening right now in front of his nose. If this new president's attachment to human rights is genuine and not just a cynical collection of sound bites, he should not be talking about history, he should be making it. Biden should start to deal with the biggest serial abuser of human rights: Israel.

That there is injustice and discrimination that meets the internationally agreed definition of apartheid, there can no longer be any doubt. One human rights organisation after another has produced exhaustive and scholarly reports testifying to its existence. Last month, it was [B'Tselem](#). This month it was [Human Rights Watch](#). Does Biden challenge this evidence? Does he agree with Israel that these reports are fictional?

The weight of evidence can no longer be ignored, the human rights abuses occur daily.

Day by day, the state of Israel, not merely its settlers, or the far right, has become more extreme in enforcing its sovereignty over the people whose lands it has seized. For how long then can Biden defend a regime whose existence depends on the daily use of force over a

people that make up 20 percent of its citizens and the majority of the population between the river and the sea?

The Abraham Accords Israel signed with two Arab states were a delusion. Netanyahu calculated that opening relations with Arab states was the means by which he could bypass a Palestinian state and ignore Palestinian rights. He was gravely wrong on both counts.

For Palestinians, it no longer matters how Biden or the rest of the world reacts. Abandoned by the international community, neglected by the media, betrayed by most Arab states, ignored by a leadership that has become irrelevant to their needs, their fate now rests in their hands alone. It rests in the streets. It always has been this way.

But don't pretend you were not warned when conflict in Jerusalem explodes.

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