

The Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif:

Threats to the Status Quo

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This update, the fourth in a series of supplements to Ir Amim’s comprehensive report, *Dangerous Liaison: The Dynamics of the Rise of the Temple Movements and their Implications*, provides detailed information regarding the ongoing erosion of existing arrangements on the Temple Mount \ Haram al-Sharif.

Summary

As described in the previous update¹, the escalation in violence surrounding the Temple Mount, as well as international pressure by the United States and Jordan, forced Prime Minister Netanyahu to break his prolonged silence and act publicly to restrain the Temple movements. An important outcome of Netanyahu’s intervention has been a near stop to public political pressure to change the agreements on the Temple Mount which for more than two years has been mounted by MKs and the government. The dissolution of the Knesset was another important factor. As a result, violence and tensions regarding the Mount have gradually subsided and access restrictions imposed on Muslim worshippers have mostly been lifted. A significant indication of the improved situation was the Jordanian government’s decision to return its ambassador to Israel three months after he was summoned back to Amman in protest of developments on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif.²

However, while the mainstream of the Israeli public and media discourse have, in the wake of the relative calm, ceased to be preoccupied with developments on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif, the Temple movements have continued their efforts relentlessly. In that the political channel, which for two years has served these movements well, is currently blocked, they are now seeking out alternative avenues for action. A previously employed strategy which may well be re-activated is “legal warfare” both against the police, which restricts their activities, and against Palestinian activities in the compound – from playing soccer to holding demonstrations. It will come as no surprise if, in the near future, Temple movements turn to the courts, pursuing legal action for changes in the arrangements on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif.

Another main channel for Temple movement activities is public opinion. The movements continue to promulgate the demand for “right of worship” across broad swathes of the Israeli population, in various ways: by taking advantage of the upcoming elections, both to promote Knesset members who are their supporters and to gain the support of candidates seeking their votes; through activities in the education system; and via media interviews; etc. Legal appeals, should they be made, could also gain media attention, bringing the issue back to the public agenda.

For these reasons, the current period of relative calm could prove merely temporary. The Netanyahu government has utterly failed to confront the root causes of compounded pressure on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif. Netanyahu, not unlike other Israeli officials, has failed to issue an unambiguous statement recognizing the compound as a place of Muslim worship. Not only does no official party in Israel expose the dangerous goals of the Temple movements, but governmental

¹[In the Ir Amim website](#)

²“The Jordanian ambassador returns to Israel”, Reshet Bet, 2/2/15
<http://www.iba.org.il/bet/bet.aspx?type=1&entity=1072994&mediaCd=884543>

support for organizations such as the Temple Institute actively continues. According to government spokespersons, the sole problem regarding the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif is Palestinian incitement. The incessant activity of Temple movements, facing no moderating forces, may sooner or later cause a renewed crisis on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif.

i. **In the Knesset and the government**

The Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif and the upcoming elections

The Temple movement activists have undertaken various activities in order to make the issue of the Temple Mount one of the most discussed in primary elections for rightwing parties: the movements sent candidates questionnaires regarding their position on the Temple Mount, ranking them according to the degree of their commitment to the causes of Temple movements, and then publishing lists of recommended candidates. On one hand, they aimed to promote their supporters in the Knesset, and on the other, took advantage of the primary elections to gain the support of candidates competing for their vote.

Some of the candidates even included the subject in their campaigns on their own initiative, and not as a response to initiatives by Temple activists.

As it turns out, however, the issue of the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif has not been especially prominent in the primaries or in campaigns for the general elections so far. Analyzing the results of the primaries, a significant correlation between the degree of success of different candidates and their involvement in the issue of the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif has not been found. Therefore, it is hard to estimate the extent to which the issue of the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif has become a political factor influencing the choices of registered party members. One noteworthy exception was the crisis (eventually solved) in the alliance talks between the Yachad and Otzma Yehudit parties, attributed to differences regarding the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif. In the past, it would have been unthinkable for this issue to be attributed such political weight, so much so that the right would lose precious Knesset seats over it.

- In the **questionnaire** sent by the joint staff of the Temple movements³, candidates in the Habayit Hayehudi primaries were asked about their positions regarding Jewish ascent and prayer on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif, their level of activity on the issue, and how they plan to act in the upcoming Knesset.
- A similar **questionnaire** was sent by Makor Rishon newspaper to the different parties, and their responses were published January 23.⁴
- **Temple movement activists also contacted Yesh Atid women MKs** with questions on the subject. MK Karin Elharar answered a question directed to her in an open Facebook chat that “the status quo should be kept, allowing Jews to ascend the Temple Mount, but not for prayer or provocation purposes.” MK Aliza Lavie answered that she condemns “ascent to the Temple Mount as a political statement and its use as a tool in the ideological struggle. The Western Wall is the symbol for peace, unity and prayer.” It should be noted that Elharar and Lavie did not hesitate to characterize Temple activists as provocateurs, and were likely the only MKs of the former coalition to do so.⁵

³“The ascenders to the Temple Mount in Habayit Hayehudi prepare for the primaries”, Temple Mount News website, 8/1/15 http://the-temple.blogspot.co.il/2015/01/blog-post_94.html

⁴“Ten Parties, four questions”, Makor Rishon, 12/1/15 http://the-temple.blogspot.co.il/2015/01/blog-post_29.html

⁵“Yesh Atid MKs: No to prayer on the Temple Mount”, Kipa website, 28/1/15, <http://www.kipa.co.il/now/60816.html>

- **The Temple Mount News website**, prior to the Likud primaries, published a detailed description of the activities of various candidates who support the Temple movements.⁶ According to this list, 7 incumbent Likud MKs actively supported the cause of Temple movements and 6 of the remaining candidates are also active on the issue.
- **Lists of recommended candidates in the Likud and Habayit Hayehudi primaries were distributed** by a group of “Temple activists in the Likud”.⁷ Similar action was taken by the group, “Students for the Temple”, affiliated with the “Im Tirtzu” movement.⁸ (The group also published on Facebook separate statuses in favor of candidates who support the Temple movements⁹).
- **A number of candidates included the issue of the Temple Mount in their campaign on their own initiative:** MK Miri Regev published a short video in which she calls for granting Jews right of worship on the Mount¹⁰; Ronen Shoval, a candidate in Habayit Hayehudi, published Facebook ads with the call “to wave the flag on the Temple Mount”; and, of course, the issue of the Temple Mount was a major part of the Likud primaries campaigns of Yehuda Glick and MK Moshe Feiglin.
- **An obstacle for the joint run for the Knesset of “Otzma Yehudit” and “Yachad - Ha'am Itanu”** – one of the main indications of change in the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif political discourse became evident in the major crisis which erupted in the talks for unification of the two lists, due apparently to their opposing views on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif. Members of the Kahanist “Otzma Yehudit” are part of the coalition of Temple movements, while “Yachad” is a Haredi party, a public which strictly opposes ascent to the Mount. Eventually the lists agreed to run together, with members of “Otzma Yehudit” pledging not to visit the Temple Mount until after the elections. Even if there were other causes, until recently it would have been hard to believe that this particular issue would lead to such a political rift, especially in that it could cost the right-wing bloc critically important Knesset seats (3-4 according to estimates). However, this is an exception, and as mentioned the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif has not become a widely addressed political issue in this election cycle.
- **Influence of the primary results** – in terms of primary results, it seems that the issue of the Temple Mount has also not played a significant role in the levels of success of the different candidates. For example, in the Likud, while MK Miri Regev impressively reached fifth place on the party list, MK Feiglin was one few incumbent MKs pushed down to an unrealistic place on the list. In Habayit Hayehudi, while Eli Ben-Dahan reached third place,¹¹ Ronen Shoval, who included the issue of the Temple Mount in his campaign, was disappointed by his placement, and may well stay out of the Knesset. In all these cases, it seems that the success or failure of the candidates relates to the sum of their activities, and that the issue of the Temple Mount was not a decisive factor for voters.

ii. **Temple movement activities**

⁶List of recommended candidates for the Likud primaries, Temple Mount News website, 18/12/14 http://the-temple.blogspot.co.il/2014/12/blog-post_40.html

⁷http://the-temple.blogspot.co.il/2014/12/blog-post_0.html?spref=b

⁸<https://www.facebook.com/StudentsForTempleMount/photos/a.566324666847115.1073741829.563018707177711/613393278806920/?type=1&theater>

⁹For example, <http://tinyurl.com/m7dor36>

¹⁰<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mBtQmdx3j8&feature=youtu.be>

¹¹Ben-Dahan has openly expressed his support for Temple movements, and as deputy minister of religious services, filed to the cabinet regulations meant to allow Jewish prayer on the mount.

The demand for right of worship as a “first step”

As previously demonstrated, while in appeals to the general public, Temple movements frame the demand for prayer on the Temple Mount as a matter of freedom of worship, meant to harm no-one, in practice, consistent and persisting statements point to more far-reaching motivations.

- **The right of prayer as a first step to be followed** – in response to the questionnaire by Temple activists regarding the issue of the Temple Mount, MK Shuli Mualem answered that “Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount is the **next step** to which with God’s help we are striving.”¹² Similar remarks were made recently by Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu: “In the **first step** we must establish a synagogue on the Temple Mount. I see no reason for anyone to oppose this, except for political reasons inappropriate for here.”¹³ In a conference of the “Im Tirtzu” affiliated “Students for the Temple” that took place in January this year, the activist leading the event explained: “The agenda **at the moment** is in the domain of human rights, and the issue of the Temple is **not for now**... The opinion of everyone is legitimate [regarding what will happen in the Temple Mount]”. (All emphasis by Ir Amim.)
- Especially telling is the statement by Linda Olmert regarding the goals of Yehuda Glick. Olmert, a close partner of Glick and an outspoken supporter of the demand for Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount, said in an interview for Times of Israel that she and Glick are divided regarding the construction of the Temple, and that she avoids attending events organized by Glick, the purpose of which is this [construction of the Temple].¹⁴
- **Double talk** – while MK Mualem has stated in the aforementioned answer that “our ambition for Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount is positive, and bears no intention of excluding other people from the Mount.” However, immediately following, she wrote: “It is our imperative to act with whomever hold the Temple Mount as sacred to keep the sanctity of the mount, and not to allow contempt and debasement of the Temple Mount”, a statement with far-reaching ramifications when considering that according to Jewish Halakha (religious rules) “the sanctity of the Mount” obliges substantial parts of the compound to be banned for non-Jewish access.
- **Statements regarding the destruction of the Dome of the Rock** – according to a Channel 10 report, Avichai Boaron, elected to 20th place in the Habayit Hayehudi list, justified some years ago a publication in a pamphlet of the organization “Ma’ayanei Hayeshua”, in which the Temple Mount appeared without the Dome of the Rock. Boaron, then-CEO of Ma’ayanei Hayeshua, said at the time: “The rabbis and activists of the movements, as every Jew in the world, long for the day when the Al-Aqsa Mosque will be erased from the Temple Mount in practice, and not just in Photoshop.” Habayit Hayehudi party, when contacted by Channel 10 for comment, refused to condemn these statements or clarify its position.¹⁵
- A group of 14 rabbis, calling themselves “the Tribunal for Matters of the Nation and the State”, including Rabbi Israel Ariel, of the Temple Institute, and Hillel Weiss, a central

¹²“MK Shuli Mualem promises to continue to work for the Temple Mount”, 13/1/15 Temple Mount News website, http://the-temple.blogspot.co.il/2015/01/blog-post_39.html

¹³“Central rabbis to the rabbinate: remove signs prohibited ascent to the Temple Mount”, 5/1/15, Temple Mount News website, <http://the-temple.blogspot.co.il/2015/01/blog-post.html>

¹⁴ “Secular activist crusades for religious access to the Temple Mount”, Times of Israel 25/12/14 <http://www.timesofisrael.com/the-temple-mounts-civil-rights-activist/#ixzz3MvPLamsi>

¹⁵“Habayit Hayehudi candidates calls for the removal of the Dome of the Rock”, 20/1/15, Channel 10, <http://news.nana10.co.il/Article/?ArticleID=1105132>

activists in MK Moshe Feiglin's Jewish Leadership group, published in early December a list of 11 *mitzvahs* regarding visiting the Temple Mount, among them:¹⁶

“A person ascending the Mount accompanied by security forces is fulfilling with every ascent the mitzvah of conquest”; “a person ascending the Mount with the goal of renewing worship in the Temple is fulfilling an active mitzvah (Nahmanides). According to the Ramban it is a mitzvah to conquer the Temple Mount, [...] even if a mighty war will be necessary”; “a person ascending to the Temple is assisting the Torah Sages to discuss again their duty to found the Third Temple... An ascent of thousands to the Temple Mount will serve as a reproof to Israel and its leaders to carry out their duty and renew worship in the Temple”; “a person ascending to the Mount hastens the tribunal of the generation to carry out its duty [to renew ritual sacrifices.]”

Toward a legal appeal?

Recently, several activists have made statements regarding their intention to conduct “legal warfare” regarding the Temple Mount. It is possible that since, for the time being, the attempt to promote their goals through the Knesset and government failed, Temple movements now plan to file legal appeals concerning the Mount: regarding Palestinian children playing ball games in the compound, police restrictions on Jewish visitors, pestering of Jews by Muslims, and political activities by Palestinian and Muslim bodies. Temple movements also continue to spread claims regarding harm to archeological artifacts on the Mount, although in practice there is no evidence of such misconduct.

Bolstered efforts by Temple organizations to document events on the Mount seem to be part of background material collection for the planned appeals. As part of the legal strategy, recurring incidents take place where Jews violate, apparently on purpose, police guidelines for behavior on the Mount. In that Temple activists see these guidelines as illegitimate, it is possible that these incidents are meant to assist a future legal course of action.

- Linda Olmert, partner of Yehuda Glick in the Liba organization, stated in an interview for the Times of Israel that “Liba changed its strategy and decided that legal warfare is the best option at this time. The organization is preparing a legal appeal, and is collecting for this purpose people’s testimonies regarding harassment and violation of civil rights on the Mount.”¹⁷
- “Students for the Temple”, a group affiliated with “Im Tirtzu” activists, has started collecting testimonies regarding what they term as “human rights violations” on the Temple Mount, under the headline “Temple Mount Watch”. One of the purposes of this product, as stated by them, is “to create pressure and lawsuits against the police”¹⁸, and this is also how the project is portrayed in a report in the Kipa website: “Documentation and photographing can assist in filing complaints against the police, and in changing the policy.”¹⁹

¹⁶“11 mitzvahs in ascending to the Temple Mount”, 4/12/14, Temple Mount News website, <http://the-temple.blogspot.co.il/2014/12/11.html>

¹⁷ “Secular Activist Crusades for Religious Access to the Temple Mount” 25/12/15 ,Time of Israel , <http://tinyurl.com/orp2dya>

¹⁸Facebook page of “Students for the Temple Mount”, 7/1/15 <https://www.facebook.com/StudentsForTempleMount/posts/609955982483983>

¹⁹“Temple Mount Watch launches”, 28/12/14, Kipa website, <http://www.kipa.co.il/now/60226.html>

- In January, it was reported that the “Chanenu” movement and Yehudah Glick filed a complaint against a Muslim cleric for delivering an inciting sermon in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and that the prosecution indicted him for incitement to violence.²⁰
- The various events detailed in the following chapter “continuing tension on the Temple Mount” are also meticulously documented by the different Temple movements. Alongside the “Temple Mount Watch” initiative previously described, Temple activists are sure to “report” Palestinians playing ball games on the mount, Palestinian demonstrations taking place there, etc. They also document and report the many incidents when Jews violated police guidelines and were removed from the compound. Of course, as in the complaint against the Muslim cleric previously described, the documentation will be used in the planned appeals.

While legal action might be a legitimate tool – in view of what it is likely to portray – ways should be explored to clarify the bigger picture and the goals for which it is being used.

iii. Continuing tension on the Temple Mount

Although there has been a significant decline in tension on the Temple Mount /Haram al-Sharif, both in terms of confrontations and in terms of restrictions on Muslim access, the situation today is far from totally calm. Jewish activists continue to violate police guidelines, provoking anger among Muslims, and arrests by the police. On the other hand, although no clashes have been reported between Palestinians and police, in the last two months there have been several protests in the compound by Islamic forces. In contrast to previous months, Israeli police have stopped placing sweeping restrictions on entry by Muslim worshippers to Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. However, the detention and removal from the compound of individual Muslims, claimed to have harassed Jewish visitors, continue on a regular basis.

- The last two months have seen an increase in incidents of Temple activists intentionally violating police guidelines, by taking such measures, for example, as sitting down on the ground,²¹ entering with non-alcoholic wine with the intention of making a blessing over it,²² tearing shirts as a sign of grief, etc.²³ These actions, opposed to police directives, cause police to remove the activists from the compound, and Muslim worshippers to gather in protest of what they see as attempts for Jewish worship in their house of worship. The Temple movements, publishing calls encouraging such activity,²⁴ aim to achieve two goals: to demonstrate their objection to the current situation on the Temple Mount, and continue bringing it to the agenda of their supporters; and, in addition, through the arrests following these actions, to show how harsh the restrictions imposed on them are.
- Since the end of November, a significant improvement took place regarding the freedom of access for Muslims on the Temple Mount: Friday restrictions, as well as bans on women from entering in the mornings, have almost stopped. However, arrests and removals of individuals by the police continue on a regular basis, apparently on the grounds of harassment of Jewish visitors to the mount: For instance, in January 11th, the police decided to remove three Muslim

²⁰“Sermon on the Temple Mount: ISIS will redeem Al-Aqsa”, NRG, 21/1/15,

<http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/671/222.html>

²¹“Tom Nissani was removed for 3 weeks from the Temple Mount”, Reshet Bet, 22/12/14,

<http://www.iba.org.il/bet/?entity=1063732&type=1>

²²“No entry for grape juice”, Channel 7 News, 16/12/14, <http://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/288983>

²³ <http://tinyurl.com/17w2awu>

²⁴ For example, <https://www.facebook.com/StudentsForTempleMount/posts/609955982483983>

women for 15 days,²⁵ on January 12th, two women were arrested,²⁶ and on January 23rd, four women were removed from the compound.²⁷

- In the last two months, several large demonstrations organized by Muslim bodies took place on the Temple Mount: on December 19th, a protest took place with calls made in support of Mohammed Deif and an armed struggle against Israel²⁸; on January 16th, following the terror attacks in Paris, a protest took place against the French magazine, Charlie Hebdo, and the French flag was burned.²⁹

²⁵ <http://silwanic.net/?p=56354>

²⁶ <http://silwanic.net/?p=56079>

²⁷ <http://silwanic.net/?p=56306>

²⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s94SFFt80Lo>

²⁹ “Watch: French flag burned on the Temple Mount”. Channel 2 News, 16/1/15, http://www.mako.co.il/news-world/arab-q1_2015/Article-1efde78ec63fa41004.htm