



Keeping the Peace on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif **During the Jewish High Holiday Period**

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A. Introduction

In recent months, the Israel Police has maintained the pattern of operations at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif on which Ir Amim reported during Passover.¹ Police have refrained from imposing collective restrictions on the entry of Muslim worshippers while at the same time increasing the number of Jewish visitors permitted to enter the Compound. In the absence of collective restrictions on the entry of Muslims, it has been for the most part possible to maintain the fragile peace. When clashes do erupt between Muslim activists and Temple activists and police forces, they quickly dissipate without the severe violence that attended the imposition of collective entry restrictions on Muslim worshippers during the fall and winter of the past two years.

Alongside the relative peace and maintenance of the status quo, both Muslim and Jewish activists and organizations continue to voice opposition to the prevailing situation. Muslim activists oppose the increase in the number of Jewish visitors while Jewish activists resist prohibitions against Jewish prayer on the site and continue to actively encourage their supporters to increase the volume of visitors as a strategic challenge to the status quo.

The past summer also witnessed an alarming pattern of emerging power struggles on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif between the Israel Police and the Waqf. On several occasions unilateral actions by the Police or the Waqf led to a corollary show of strength by the other side. As a result, what could have been

¹ For a recent Ir Amim analysis of the relationship between collective restrictions and the security situation on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, see *Haaretz* report: <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/1731>

contained to localized disagreements resolved through dialogue escalated into clashes, precipitating violence and arrests. Such clashes naturally impair the vital coordination between these two bodies and serve the interests of those who are hostile to cooperation: on the one hand, various Muslim elements that oppose the Waqf's recognition of Israeli authority at Islam's third holiest site; on the other, right-wing Israeli elements that forcefully oppose the growing strength of the Waqf (accountable to the Jordanian authorities) and seek to ensure Israeli hegemony at Judaism's holiest site. Senior Israeli politicians have recently resumed public support of the Temple movements after having refrained from issuing statements since the Jewish high holidays in 2015 at the instruction of the prime minister. The deputy defense minister went so far as to declare that "we want to build the Temple."

As the high holidays approach, this paper examines current developments on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif, describing emergent trends during the period of relative calm the Police has managed to maintain – trends which threaten the fragile calm for new reasons – and culminating with recommendations for how best to prevent a renewed deterioration in order to preserve the status quo.

General recommendations elaborated in the paper:

- 1. The Israel Police should continue to refrain from imposing collective entry restrictions on Muslim worshippers.** It is also important that decision makers make clear to the Israeli public that maintaining Muslim freedom of worship on the site is a basic component of the status quo as well as being essential to the prevention of violence and the effectiveness of Police operations.
- 2. As he has in the past, the prime minister should publicly instruct members of his government, coalition, and party not to provide support for the Temple movements either through declaration or action.** Given the public responsibility borne by the members of his coalition, the prime minister is entitled to use sanctions against any members who ignore his instructions.
- 3. The Israeli government should be careful to ensure coordination with Jordan regarding site visits. Coordinated arrangement of all activities, including simultaneous entry of multiple groups and permission for earlier entrance times, should be made in advance of such visits.** Defining clear procedures by Israel and Jordan (and the Waqf) will prevent an exacerbation of tensions on the ground and will also inhibit the creation of situations in which Israel subsequently retracts decisions, thereby indicating that it has submitted to pressure groups on either side. **All procedures should provide for pre-emptive coordination to contain developing tensions should they arise.**

4. **Decision makers should support ongoing and respectful coordination between the Police and the Waqf.**
5. **The Israeli government should immediately terminate its financial and political support of the Temple movements.** The government's commitment to the status quo – and even more so to the integrity of the mosques – is incompatible with governmental support for these bodies.
6. **Public figures and religious leaders on both sides, Israeli and Palestinian, should become increasingly involved in cultivating religious and public discussion within and between the communities to encourage interfaith dialogue and tolerance.**

B. In the Absence of Collective Restrictions, Level of Incidents on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif Falls and Number of Jewish Visitors Rises

Since the end of the high holidays last year (the beginning of October 2015), the Israel Police has not resumed its former policy of imposing collective restrictions on the entry of Muslim worshippers to the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif. The removal of these collective restrictions has led to a significant relaxing of tensions, even during the months when serious attacks occurred throughout Jerusalem. The number of incidents over the past year was relatively minor and events have been largely less intense than during preceding years and remained localized.

The Police command has expressed pride at this success, which it attributes to its own actions. For example, the minister of internal security wrote on his Facebook page: “The Jerusalem District Police prepared ideally and took the necessary steps, and we witnessed one of the quietest Tisha B’Av days seen on the Temple Mount in years.”²

In response to the prohibition maintained by the Netanyahu government against Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount – essential to the status quo – the Police has attempted to placate the Temple movements and other right-wing elements by highlighting the consistent increase in the number of Jewish visitors permitted to enter the Compound. Police officers stationed at the entrance to the Mughrabi Gate determine the timing and size of Jewish groups visiting the site. During the period immediately following the high holidays in 2015, the Temple movements

² [Twitter account](#) of Minister of Internal Security Gilad Erdan, 14 August 2016 (Tisha B’Av) (in Hebrew).

protested that police were restricting visits to 60 people a day.³ Over the following months, the police abandoned this restriction. During the five intermediate days of Passover, when the site was open to non-Muslims, some 200 Jews a day visited – a total of 1,000 over the five days.⁴ The upward trend in the number of Jews visiting the site has continued since then. Some 300 Jews visited the Temple Mount on Jerusalem Day,⁵ and a record number of 400 on Tisha B'Av,⁶ made possible by the Police allowing two groups of Jewish visitors to enter the site simultaneously in a reversal of policy maintained for years. The Police also moved back the start of security checks for Jews entering the site by half an hour (with no change to the visiting hours themselves).⁷

As noted, in comparison to recent years a significant reduction has been seen in the number of clashes on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif. The success of the Police in maintaining the status quo and in allowing Jews to enter the site without restricting Muslims' freedom of access is not a trivial development. Despite the significant increase in the number of Jews visiting the site, tensions have not devolved into the serious violence witnessed during the Jewish high holidays in 2014 and 2015, once again reinforcing Ir Amim's repeated attention to the correlation between application of collective restrictions and upticks in tension and violence. As seen over the recent Jewish festivals and holy days, when general freedom of access of Muslims to the holy site is maintained, opposition and unrest provoked by the heightened activities of the Temple movements on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif does not degenerate into outbreaks of violence.

That being said, the acquiescence of the Police to the demand to increase the number of Jewish visitors to the Temple Mount has sometimes resulted in the implementation of flawed decisions. In the past (beginning at latest in 2012), the site was closed to non-Muslim visitors during the last 10 days of Ramadan, when the number of Muslim worshippers at the Haram al-Sharif is high and

³ Moshe Steinmetz, "[New Police Procedure: Number of Jewish Visitors to Temple Mount Restricted to 60 a Day](#)," *Walla*, 23 November 2015 (in Hebrew)

⁴ [Students for Temple Mount - Official Page](#), Facebook, 30 April 2016 (in Hebrew).

⁵ [Temple Mount - Weekly Summary: From the Liberation of Jerusalem to the Giving of the Torah](#), Temple news website, 9 June 2016 (in Hebrew).

⁶ "[Police, Palestinians Scuffle on Temple Mount as Jews flock to Western Wall for Tisha B'Av](#)," *Times of Israel*, 14 August 2016.

⁷ "Eased Conditions [for Jews Visiting Temple Mount at Passover](#)," Temple news website, 22 April 2016 (in Hebrew).

accompanied by intensive religious activities. Encouraged by the calm that had prevailed on the site at Passover, and due to Temple movements applying ongoing pressure on the minister of internal security, this year the Police permitted non-Muslims to enter during the 10 day period. This unilateral decision led to rioting at the site; despite which, the Police continued to allow non-Muslims to enter for two additional days. The clashes that followed, including stone throwing at the Western Wall Plaza for the first time in several years, resulted in minor injury to a Jewish woman. Only after three days of clashes and after the minister of internal security was summoned to a discussion with the prime minister, did the Police withdraw its decision and close the site to non-Muslims until the end of Eid al-Fitr.⁸

In a report published recently by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Nadav Shragai quotes a political source as stating that the understandings between Israel and Jordan, reached under US auspices, include Israel undertaking to restrict the number of religious Jewish visitors to the Temple Mount. When the quota of visitors is increased, such actions are normally taken in coordination with Jordan.⁹

C. From Visits to the Temple Mount to “Correcting the Disgrace of Exile”

Many Temple activists have expressed their pronounced satisfaction with the fact that larger numbers of Jews are being permitted to visit the Temple Mount. Member of Knesset Yehuda Glick often references the increase in the number of Jewish visitors.¹⁰ Asaf Fried, who serves as the liaison between the Temple movements and the Police, gives the Police full credit for the change, writing that “5776 will be remembered as the year of change on the Temple Mount.”¹¹ Arnon Segal, a leading activist in the Temple movements who writes and edits a weekly column on the subject of the Temple Mount for the newspaper *Makor Rishon*, commented on the entry of 400 Jews during Tisha B’Av: “1,946 years after the destruction, we are on the way back up. I’m proud to belong to this wonderful

⁸ Nir Hasson, “[Palestinians stone Western Wall worshippers; Police shut Temple Mount to non-Muslims](#),” *Haaretz*, 28 June 2016.

⁹ Nadav Shragai, “[Protecting the Status of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem](#),” 2016.

¹⁰ For example, on [MK Glick's Facebook page](#) a few days before Tisha B’Av, 9 August 2016 (in Hebrew).

¹¹ Asaf Fried, “The Year of Change,” [Arutz 7 website](#), 15 August 2016 (in Hebrew).

group and I am convinced that it will be remembered for generations as the group that repaired the disgrace of exile.”¹²

These enthusiastic remarks should raise some questions. Asaf Fried openly declares that he longs for “the day when we will realize our sovereignty on the Temple Mount and confiscate it from the hands of Islam. Only then will Islam understand that we are here for eternity.”¹³ Arnon Segal often refers to the prohibition against Jewish prayer as “apartheid,” and is known for declaring that the Temple should be built “not tomorrow, but now. Immediately. We already have an altar ready at the Temple Institute and we will begin to make sacrifices even before the Temple is established.”¹⁴ These statements beg the question of why Temple activists describe the increase in the number of Jewish visitors as “the year of change” or the repairing of “the disgrace of exile.”

The explanation can be found in a comment made repeatedly by Temple activists. Once large numbers of Jews visit the Temple Mount, they argue, the government will be forced to permit Jewish prayer – the first step toward removing the Dome of the Rock and building the Temple. Arnon Segal states:

Once they let people go up to the Temple Mount properly, then hundreds of thousands of Jews will go up. There will be prayer and then sacrifices and then a Temple. It will not be possible to prevent it... Hearts are drawn to actions. I don't care if I'm the village lunatic. I'm testing boundaries and the further right I go, the more it becomes legitimate to be to my left. (28 November, 2013)¹⁵

Elishama Sandman, founder of the organization Yeraeh, which publishes weekly statistics on the number of Jews visiting the Temple Mount:

Our aspiration is to build a Temple on the Temple Mount. In order to get to a Temple, there is a path that must be followed, and along this path there are various milestones that are effectively our more immediate goals: Allowing open and free prayer on the

¹² [Arnon Segal's Facebook page](#), 14 August 2016 (in Hebrew).

¹³ Asaf Fried, “[The Way to Peace - Realizing Sovereignty on the Temple Mount](#),” *Temple Mount News*, 31 May 2016 (in Hebrew).

¹⁴ Netael Bendel, “Arnon Segal Wants to Build the Temple Yesterday,” [Kipa website](#), 28 November 2013 (in Hebrew).

¹⁵ Ibid.

Mount, extending the entry hours for Jews as well as broad awareness among the people and so forth. (24 March 2016)¹⁶

Member of Knesset Glick often uses this argument. In 2009, before becoming a member of Knesset, he explained:

If the public wants to connect by... coming to the Temple Mount... Then the demand to build [the Temple] will also not come from two or three people but from a large and broad public, to the point that the Israeli government will not be able to refuse. (July 2009)¹⁷

Last year, Glick explained in an interview for *Yediot Aharonot* why the Israeli government does not change the status quo on the Temple Mount:

You know who's to blame for this? The people of Israel. Because 50,000 Jews aren't standing at the entrance to the Temple Mount demanding to go up; that's the only thing that's stopping us. (7 October 2015)¹⁸

More recently, at a memorial event for the late Hallel Ariel, who was murdered in Kiryat Arba, Glick (a Member of Knesset by this time) repeated his comments:

If everyone here today comes here every day, every month... everyone will undertake to do what they can to bring hundreds of people. Because the change on the Temple Mount will come from us. Open up a hole the size of the eye of a needle, and I will make an opening the size of the Temple hall. Everyone should undertake to be the one that conquers the Temple Mount. Conquering makes things better, conquering brings might... And that can only happen if you come here again and again and bring others. (12 July 2016)¹⁹

Alongside such comments, some Temple activists harness the increasing number of visitors to advance its challenge to the status quo. On Tisha B'Av, 10 Temple activists were removed from the site, some for attempting to pray or to rip their shirt (the traditional symbol of mourning for the destruction of the Temple). During the intermediate days of Passover and on Jerusalem Day, attempts to pray led to the removal of several activists from the Temple Mount by the Police.

¹⁶ Elishama Sandman, Yeraeh, "[Bringing Joy back to the Temple Mount](#)," *Temple Mount News*, 24 March 2016 (in Hebrew).

¹⁷ Yehuda Glick in an interview for the magazine *Tal Shamayim*, July 2009 (in Hebrew).

¹⁸ MK Glick in an interview for *Yediot Aharonot*, 7 October 2015 (in Hebrew).

¹⁹ Video clip on [Jack Blach's Facebook page](#), 12 July 2016 (in Hebrew).

On the other side of the divide, Muslim elements have expressed opposition to the increase in the number of Jewish visitors and continue to describe the visits as “invasions by settlers into the Al-Aqsa Compound under the auspices of the Police.” While the tone is inflammatory, declarations from Temple activists indicate that Muslims’ anxieties about the intentions of the “visits” are far from unsubstantiated. Attempts by Temple activists to pray on the site amplify and reinforce the legitimacy of these protests among the broader Muslim public. Thus, while visits by Jews to the Temple Mount are recognized under the status quo, they are exploited by both Temple Mount and Muslim activists who seek to challenge current arrangements.

D. Dangerous Statements by Government and Coalition Members

After many months of restraint, members of Netanyahu’s coalition have once again begun to engage in publicly supporting the Temple movements. Even after entering the Knesset, **MK Yehuda Glick (Likud)** continues to make provocative statements urging Jews “to conquer the Mount” and promising, “Open up a hole the size of the eye of a needle and I will make an opening the size of the Temple hall.”

During a radio debate with MK Masud Ganaim (Joint List), **MK Bezalel Smotrich (Jewish Home)** declared: “The Temple is not supposed to be built on top of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which lies outside the original area of the Temple Mount... We naturally wish to build the Temple in its original place, where the Dome of the Rock is situated.” MK Ganaim also expressed himself in problematic terms, declaring that MK Smotrich has nothing to look for in a compound that is sacred to the Muslims,²⁰ thereby denying any historical Jewish connection to the Mount.

On Tisha B’Av, the right-wing settler movement Women in Green held a march to the Lions’ Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem. In one speech at the event, **Deputy Defense Minister MK Eli Ben-Dahan (Jewish Home)** declared: “We aren’t embarrassed to say it: We want to build the Temple on the Temple Mount. Israel’s fighters and residents know to declare that this is the heart and the principal.”²¹

²⁰ [MK Smotrich: "Temple to Be Built on Temple Mount, Where the Dome of the Rock Stands,"](#) *Ma'ariv*, 14 June 2016 (in Hebrew).

²¹ Eliran Aharon, [“We're not embarrassed to say it: We want to rebuild the Temple,”](#) Arutz 7 website, 13 August 2016.

In July, Prime Minister Netanyahu reiterated his distinction between the status of Jews and Muslims on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif. Replying to a parliamentary question from MK Shuli Moalem, Netanyahu referred to the former as “visitors” and the latter as “worshippers.”²² Nonetheless, the prime minister has failed to respond, let alone to take action, following the inflammatory comments made by members of his government, coalition, and party.

E. Confrontations between the Waqf and the Police

According to the status quo and agreements with Jordan, Israel exercises security powers on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif while the Waqf is responsible for management of the site.²³ Contrary to the impression created among some segments of the Israeli public, Waqf officials play an important role in restraining Muslim protests at the site and in maintaining control and preventing the eruption of violence. As part of attempts to prevent a serious escalation of violence during the Jewish high holidays, Israel and Jordan agreed to increase the number of Waqf officials on the site.²⁴ Over the past year, the number of officials has increased from 300 to 400, and over the coming year they are expected to be joined by another 100 officials. The strengthening of the Waqf also helps to convey the message that the status of Haram al-Sharif as a Muslim holy site is not under threat, thereby contributing to reduction of protests. Prime Minister Netanyahu recently explained in the Knesset: “In the arrangement with the State of Israel, the Waqf plays a role in monitoring the various elements active on the Mount, not only us... We requested the strengthening of the Waqf through our contacts with the Jordanian government.”²⁵

The Temple activists are passionately opposed to a “foreign body” holding authority on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif, and to Waqf officials’ inspection of groups of Temple activists visiting the site. Though right-wing

²² [Question Time with the Prime Minister](#), 18 July 2016, minute 18:00. On the importance of this distinction in the context of the imposition of entry restrictions on Muslim worshippers to the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif in order to facilitate the entry of Jewish visitors, see: Ir Amim, “[Collective Restrictions on the Entry of Muslim Worshippers to the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif](#),” 31 October 2015.

²³ For example, see *Sovereignty of God and Man*, ed. Yitzhak Reiter, pp. 397 ff. (in Hebrew).

²⁴ Nadav Shragai, “[Between the Dome of the Rock and a Hard Place](#),” *Israel Hayom*, 19 August 2016.

²⁵ [Question Time with the Prime Minister](#), 18 July 2016, minute 19:30.

complaints about Waqf officials are not new, they have become increasingly numerous. In July, MK Shuli Moalem (Jewish Home) submitted a question regarding “harassment by Waqf officials” to the prime minister as part of “Question Time” in the Knesset plenum.²⁶ In August, it was reported that the Professors for a Strong Israel group had petitioned the High Court of Justice to order the prime minister to take action against “the systemic provocations by Waqf officials toward Jewish visitors on the Temple Mount.”²⁷ The newspaper *Makor Rishon* published a long form piece by Arnon Segal sharply criticizing the increase in the number of Waqf officials: “As noted, the Waqf forces are hired and trained by Jordan and are loyal to its king, and it is unclear how this can be reconciled with the *Basic Law: Jerusalem, Israel’s Capital*, which explicitly stipulates: ‘No authority relating to the area of Jerusalem granted by law to the State of Israel or the Municipality of Jerusalem shall be transferred to any political or governmental foreign body, or to any other similar body, whether permanently or for a fixed period.’”²⁸

In practice, coordination between the Police and the Waqf is not as close as would be optimal. Over the past few months there has been a recurring pattern of disagreements and uncoordinated actions by either side, leading to a forceful response by the other and ultimately precipitating a cyclical loop of retaliatory reactions. One example occurred at the beginning of the Ramadan fasting period. The day after a police person accidentally broke a Waqf official’s leg with a Police vehicle, Waqf officials prevented police vehicles from entering the site. In response, for several days the Police prohibited the entry of several hundred meals for breaking the daily fast.²⁹

A further round of incidents occurred some 10 days before Tisha B’Av, after the Police prevented Waqf officials from repairing an underground water pipe. While the execution of such repairs is within the Waqf’s authority, it is intended to be undertaken under the supervision of the Israel Antiquities Authority. The resulting confrontation led to the removal of three Waqf officials from the site, one of whom was summoned for questioning by the Police. Over the ensuing days, police prevented the Waqf reconstruction team from undertaking

²⁶ [Question Time with the Prime Minister](#), 18 July 2016, minute 16:20.

²⁷ [“Rightwing Academics Petition Supreme Court over Waqf Harassment on Temple Mount,”](#) *The Jewish Press*, 19 August 2016.

²⁸ Arnon Segal, [“The Jordanian Legion,”](#) *Makor Rishon*, 12 August 2016 (in Hebrew).

²⁹ Nir Hasson, [“Tension Rises on Temple Mount as Israel Police Block Ramadan Meals,”](#) *Haaretz*, 9 June 2016.

reconstruction work on the mosaic inside the Dome of the Rock. After attempting to conduct the work, several Waqf officials were removed from the site and arrested by the Police. A few days later, they were permitted to resume work.³⁰

Such incidents convey the impression of a power struggle, rather than coordination, between the Police and the Waqf. The Waqf insists on its independence and on some occasions refuses to recognize the Antiquities Authority as a body from which it must secure permission to undertake actions at the site. The Police, for its part, at times uses a free hand in exercising its enforcement authority.

F. Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite improvement in the situation on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif, powerful elements opposed to the status quo on the site remain active. As Ir Amim noted in a recent policy paper, ongoing attempts to erode the status quo demonstrate that current enforcement methods applied by the Police are insufficient. A parallel and more profound response must be issued by the political leadership of Israel and respected public figures. Accordingly, the following are Ir Amim's recommendations, for the short term, for maintaining calm on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif during the Jewish high holidays:

1. **The Police should continue to refrain from imposing collective entry restrictions on Muslim worshippers**, particularly since it has been demonstrated – as earlier evidenced by Ir Amim³¹ – that the suspension of this policy has directly resulted in a cessation of violence. It is also important that decision makers publicly assert that maintaining Muslim freedom of worship on the Temple Mount site is a basic component of the status quo as well as being essential to the prevention of violence and the effectiveness of Police operations.
2. While the prime minister has continued to express his commitment to the status quo, he cannot confine himself to the understandings reached with Jordan and to imposing responsibility on the Police for managing the tensions on the ground. **As he has in the past, the prime minister should**

³⁰ Nir Hasson, "[Tension Rises on Temple Mount as Jewish Fast of Tisha B'Av Nears](#)," *Haaretz*, 8 August 2016.

³¹ "[Collective Restrictions on the Entry of Muslim Worshippers to the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif](#)," Ir Amim, 2 November 2015.

publicly prohibit members of his government, coalition, and party from providing support, declaratory or through actions, to the Temple movements. Given the public responsibility borne by the members of his coalition, the prime minister is entitled to use sanctions against any members who ignore his instruction.

3. The two successes for which the Police have assumed responsibility – the reduction in confrontations and the increase in the number of Jewish visitors – are liable to clash. During the Jewish high holidays tensions may be exacerbated, by the high number of Jewish visitors expected to enter the site almost daily over a period of three weeks. **The Israeli government should be careful to ensure coordination with Jordan regarding visits to the site. Coordinated arrangements should be made in advance for such visits, including arrangements for the simultaneous entry of multiple groups and permission of earlier entrance times.** Defining clear procedures by Israel and Jordan (and the Waqf) will prevent an exacerbation of tensions on the ground and will also inhibit development of situations in which Israel subsequently retracts decisions, thereby indicating that it has submitted to pressure groups on either side. **All procedures should provide for pre-emptive coordination to contain developing tensions should they arise.**
4. **Decision makers should support ongoing and respectful coordination between the Police and the Waqf.**
5. **The Israeli government should immediately terminate its financial and political support for the Temple movements.** In 2015, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture continued to allocate budgets to the Mikdash Educational Center and the Temple Institute. The government's commitment to the status quo – and even more so to the integrity of the mosques – is incompatible with governmental support for these bodies.
6. **Public figures and religious leaders on both sides, Israeli and Palestinian, should become increasingly involved in the cultivation of religious and public discussion within and between the communities to encourage interfaith dialogue and tolerance.**