

# Jordan and Jerusalem's Islamic sanctuaries

Sawsan Ramahi



# Jordan and Jerusalem's Islamic sanctuaries

Sawsan Ramahi

The issue of Jerusalem is at the core of the Palestinian cause, which in turn is at the core of the conflict with Zionism. In other words, the issue of Jerusalem cannot be viewed in isolation from the Palestine-Israel conflict. Thus, when examining the dimensions of Jordan's relationship to the Palestinian cause, particularly with regard to Jerusalem's Islamic sanctuaries, a discussion of the beginnings of this relationship is important.

## Jordan's historic role in Jerusalem

The Hashemite relationship with Jerusalem dates back to the establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan following World War I, and the Hashemite compensation for the loss of the Hejaz and the two Holy sanctuaries of Makkah and Madinah. Transjordan was established in 1921, after the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 and the Balfour Declaration of 1917. Transjordan, like Palestine, was Britain's stake in the Franco-British agreement after it reneged on its promise to Shariff Hussein bin Ali to help him establish a single Arab state in exchange for the Arabs joining the Allies against the axis during the First World War (1914-1918). Thus, instead of helping to unite the Arabs, Britain, along with France and a number of other colonial countries, undertook to divide the Arabs into tiny states and create division between them as a means of exerting control. This was also done in order to pave the way for the establishment of Israel, "the national homeland of the Jewish people", at the expense of Palestine and its people.

## The beginning of Jordanian guardianship over Jerusalem

The history of this guardianship dates back to Shariff Hussein bin Ali's visit to Transjordan in 1924 when he was still King of the Hejaz. He stayed for a number of days in al-Shuna where, on the afternoon of the 11th of March, he was met by a joint popular and official delegation from the people of Palestine led by a group of its most prominent men including Musa Kazim Al-Husseini, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Arab Palestinian Conference, Al-Haj Amin Al-Husseini, Chairman of the Supreme Islamic Council, and Ragheb Nashashibi, the Mayor of Jerusalem. On this day, the people of Palestine gave allegiance to the Islamic Caliphate of Hussein bin Ali which was completed officially in Amman on the 14th of the same month. On the day allegiance was given, he donated twenty four thousand gold Dinars from his own purse for the reconstruction of Al-Aqsa Mosque.

This was followed by the Palestinian Nakba/Catastrophe of 1948 and the subsequent announcement of the establishment of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to which the West Bank was annexed, thus demarcating its relationship of control and guardianship over Jerusalem. This guardianship appeared most clearly following the occupation of Jerusalem by the Israeli army in 1967 and the demise of Jordanian control. At

this point, Israel pursued a policy of “open bridges” and tried to implement the idea of “job sharing”. However, Palestinian struggles coupled with the demise of the “Jordanian option” led to an extended conflict between Palestinians and Jordan on the administration of Islamic endowments in Jerusalem. This conflict has been at the heart of Palestinian-Jordanian relations since the establishment of Israel and even contributed to the decision to disengage the West Bank from Jordan in 1988.

It could even be argued that the Jordanian decision to disengage from the West Bank on the one hand, and the Oslo Accords on the other, increased confusion over Jordan’s “guardianship”. Jordan began to speak about “care” as one of its most important duties toward Palestine and Islam. The Palestinian sides found benefit in this that was previously absent given the weakness of the Palestinian side.

## The international legal position on the status of occupied Jerusalem and its sanctuaries

Prior to the aggression of 5 June 1967, not a single Jew lived in East Jerusalem. Thus, the United Nations has rejected all Zionist resolutions that seek to alter the status of Jerusalem as an occupied city. In the resolution issued by the United Nations General Assembly on 4 July 1967 at its fifth special session, it called on Israel to rescind all measures it had taken previously and to refrain immediately from any action that alters the status of Jerusalem. In another resolution it issued on 14 July of the same session, the General Assembly denounced Israel’s non-implementation of the first resolution and reiterated its demands.

UN Security Council Resolution 242 issued on 22 November 1967 emphasised the inadmissibility of acquiring territory through war. The Council also issued Resolution 252 on 21 May 1968, which referred back to its July resolutions on Jerusalem and to the actions Israel pursued in violation of these resolutions. It stressed that all administrative and legislative measures taken by Israel, including the acquisition of territory and the property therein, which aim at altering the legal status of Jerusalem are invalid and cannot effectively alter that status.

On 3 July 1969, the Security Council reiterated resolution 267 which appealed to Israel and it issued similar resolutions until August 1980. Moreover, General Assembly resolutions have refused to recognise Israeli sovereignty over the occupied city, and, since 1948, the UN has both condemned and opposed Israel’s claim to sovereignty over West Jerusalem.

On 10 October 1969, UNESCO issued a resolution confirming that the assault by the Zionist state of Israel on cultural and civilisational property and archaeological artifacts in Jerusalem and the West Bank amounted to violations. It demanded that it refrain from any archaeological excavations, the transfer of similar properties and their proceedings that alter the appearance or cultural and historical characteristics of these territories.

However, unlike 1948, the residents of East Jerusalem never abandoned their duty of remaining in the Holy City, thus preventing the Zionists from having free rein and forcing Jordan to continue to take care of its sanctuaries and provide support for its endowments. When Jordan relinquished its link to the West Bank in 1988, it continued

to allocate funds for the restoration of Al-Haram al-Shariff, the Noble Sanctuary of Al-Aqsa.

## Jerusalem in the Arab peace agreements:

### a. Jerusalem in the 1979 Camp David Accord:

The Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty considered UN Security Council Resolution 242 the basis for the peace process, and Egypt considered Jerusalem part of the occupied West Bank. What is interesting is that the Camp David Accords did not want any reference made to the issue of Jerusalem, and taking into account the fact that Resolution 242 was considered the main reference for the negotiations, it has always been a bone of contention in terms of interpretations. The Israeli side has attempted to interpret the resolution in a way that serves its purpose toward controlling part of the occupied territories, particularly Jerusalem. Even the agreement on self-rule stipulated within the Accord has been interpreted by Israel as being a reference to the autonomy of the inhabitants and not the region as a whole. The Egyptian side insisted during negotiations that Administrative Council elections should include residents of East Jerusalem, which the Israeli Authority categorically rejects on the grounds that it limits its sovereignty over East Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is not included among the regions covered by the agreement on self-rule on the grounds that it is Israel's "eternal capital" which constitutes more than 26 per cent of the total area of the West Bank. At the ceremony for the signing of the peace agreement with Egypt, Begin declared that the greatest achievement of his life was the day Jerusalem became a unified city.

It is worth noting that Jerusalem was excluded from Egypt-Israel discussions, and discussions regarding Jerusalem were limited to a letter sent by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to US President Jimmy Carter. The letter clearly shows the extent of the incompatibility in the positions taken up by both Egypt and Israel.

### b. Jerusalem in the Israel-Palestine Peace Agreement:

The Israel-Palestine Agreement signed on 13 September 1993 did not want any reference made to negotiations and so made no mention of the UN Charter, the General Assembly or the Security Council Resolutions. And although the transitional period of self-rule was based on the settlement of the issue of Jerusalem pursuant to Resolutions 242 and 338, the memorandum of invitation mentioned that negotiations were based on Resolution 242 only in terms of interpretation and not implementation. The agreement thus ignored the issue of Palestinian sovereignty over Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The agreement allowed residents of Jerusalem to participate in self-rule elections. However, Israel succeeded in diverting international and regional attention away from the status of Jerusalem, discussions of which were left to the final stage of the peace process.

In discussion of the drawbacks of the agreement, Dr Walid Khalidi highlights a number of its negative aspects, the most important of which are: the agreement did not

specify which Jerusalem it referred to; was it 1967 East Jerusalem? Was it the Old City of Jerusalem which contains the holy places? Was it West Jerusalem on the other side of the 1967 Jordan-Israel armistice line? Or was it Greater Israeli Jerusalem which extends from the Kiryat Arba' in Al-Khalil [Hebron] to Beit El [Bethel] to the north of Ramallah, and from al-Khan al-Ahmar in the east to Amwas in the west?

It should be noted that the Oslo Accords do not oblige Israel to settle the issue of Jerusalem, while Resolution 242 includes Jerusalem to mean a portion of the West Bank.

By including the issue of Jerusalem in final settlement discussions, Israel aimed at using the delay to increase the Jewish population of the city to 180,000 individuals. Thus, when the issue is placed on the negotiating table, the Arabs will be left with nothing more than the religious sites. This will allow the issue of Jerusalem to be tackled within the context of a religious rather than political perspective, and takes into account the fact that whoever has political sovereignty, will also have religious control. As such, the agreement buys Israel the time it needs to Judaize Jerusalem through settlement construction and land confiscation.

#### c. Jerusalem in the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty:

Before Jerusalem fell under Israeli occupation in 1967, it was under the care of Jordan as previously mentioned. The Hashemites were interested in construction, development and maintenance programmes in Al-Aqsa Mosque funded by King Hussein.

Following the peace initiative by President Anwar Sadat in 1977 and his visit to Jerusalem, the Jordanian response was marked by caution and moderation in an attempt by King Hussein to keep all options open. At the time, Jordan was more moderate than most other Arab states in condemning Begin's inadequate response to Sadat's generous offer of peace, and in criticising the policy of establishing settlements in the West Bank. At the same time, King Hussein was keen not to tie himself in with Sadat's initiative, or anything that would indicate support for it. His doubts increased over the possibility of a peace settlement with Israel in the wake of Likud's rise to power during Israel's May 1977 elections. The Likud government had insisted on emphasising Jewish rights in the West Bank on religious and ideological grounds regardless of security issues, in addition to certain members of the Israeli cabinet confirming that they considered Jordan to be a Palestinian state.

Following the proposals made by Begin in Ismailia, Jordanian fears increased as they gave judgement in favour of the people and not the land and confined Jordan's assigned role to one of representative participation alongside Israel and the Administrative Council elected for self-rule within the legislative framework for the autonomous region and other issues.

Then the initiative by US President Ronald Reagan was put forward which resonated with Jordan as it rejected the idea of its fragmentation or that its final status should be decided by negotiations. Jordan also welcomed the initiative put forward by US Secretary of State Shultz in 1988, but was forced to reject it due to Palestinian and Syrian opposition.

With regard to Jerusalem, the Jordan-Israel agreement allowed for the holy places to remain under the auspices of Jordan and, from there, there was competition between whoever has sovereignty over Jerusalem and the West Bank and whoever is given the right of deputeeship over the Palestinians following the 1974 Rabat Resolution. With this, Israel thus closed the file on co-existence with the Palestinians in the Holy City.

Article 3 of the Washington Declaration signed on 25 July 1994 stipulates that Israel should respect the distinguished current role assigned to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in relation to Jerusalem's Islamic holy sites. However, while negotiations on the final status of the city take their course, Israel will hold primacy over Jordan's historic role in this regard. In addition, the two parties agreed to work jointly toward strengthening relations between the three monotheistic religions.

Article 9 of the Jordan-Israel Treaty stipulates [in accordance with the Washington Declaration] that Israel should respect the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's specific current role in relation to Jerusalem's Islamic holy sites. However, once final status negotiations are in play, Israel will be given greater priority over Jordan and its historic role.

Article [9], item [1] of the Jordan-Israel Treaty stipulates that each of the other parties has freedom of access to places of religious and historic significance in the city. The Palestine-Jordan dispute settlement over Jordan's role as patron over Jerusalem's sacred sites is predicated on a desire to ensure that a vacuum does not emerge which would allow Jerusalem to become subject to Israel's Ministry of Religions, and from there result in its loss. To ensure that the Jordan-Israel Treaty does not affect the future of the Palestinian territories, Jordan has been keen to include this in it expressly.

## Jerusalem in the 2000 Camp David II Accords

The issue of Jerusalem was raised within the context of final status issues negotiated on in Camp David II discussions. The conference brought together Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation Yasser Arafat and US President Bill Clinton. Israel and the United States suggested that the Palestinian National Authority be granted sovereignty over the Arab quarter [Christian and Muslim] which constituted an area of no more than one-third of a kilometre. Israel refused to raise the issue of the Old City of Jerusalem in its entirety, neither the Jerusalem Municipality nor East Jerusalem.

Al-Haram al-Shariff:

The issue of sovereignty over the Haram al-Shariff was put forward in various formats over the course of negotiations, the last of which occurred during Camp David II. Israel proposed to the Palestinian negotiators that they would have sovereignty over what was above the land while Israel would maintain sovereignty over what was below it. The Palestinians negotiators rejected this offer out of fear that it would give legitimacy to excavations being carried out below the Noble Sanctuary by a group of Temple trustees. This refusal precipitated the failure of the negotiations which had lasted for two weeks and led – among other things – to the outbreak of the Aqsa Intifada (uprising).

Clinton's proposals:

The two sides returned to negotiations in the United States in late December 2000 and President Bill Clinton put forward proposals which Barak announced he would accept if the PLO declared their approval of them first. They included Israel relinquishing the majority of Arab East Jerusalem and maintaining control over the Jewish Quarter and a portion of the Armenian Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem. This was put forward within the context of other proposals on refugees and settlements. In statements published after the negotiations, members of both delegations said that the United States had put forward the idea of annexing Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in exchange for Israel giving the Palestinians some land in the Negev Desert. They both also stated that the American proposal included a compromise on the Palestinians' Right of Return to their land. The PLO requested additional details from the United States, but the latter refused to provide these details without prior agreement from the PLO on the proposals.

### Jerusalem in the Annapolis Negotiations (2007-2008)

Al-Haram al-Shariff was a subject rarely raised during the Annapolis negotiations which consisted of 260 discussion sessions between November 2007 and December 2008. This was mainly due to the domestic political situation in Israel. The coalition partners of Ehud Olmert, the Israeli Prime Minister at the time, demanded that the question of the Noble Sanctuary and the holy sites should remain without a solution. Indeed, the extremist Israeli political party, Shas, threatened to withdraw from the coalition if the issue of the sanctuary was so much as raised during discussions.

Thus, the Israeli negotiating delegation was not authorised to discuss the Haram as stated in a meeting on 2 July 2008 by Udi Dikl, the Olmert government's Chief Negotiator, who said he was unable to discuss anything related to Jerusalem.

During a meeting on 29 May 2008 held in Jerusalem in the period following Annapolis, Dikl told Palestinian Authority officials that the criteria of the peace process had changed. He told a PLO cartographer that "since 2000, certain things have happened and as a result we are not at the same point that we started from. Circumstances have changed dramatically since then. Facts have changed. As such, we do not consider that we should stop the wheels of time and that we are still in 2000. The Middle East has changed."

At a later point during the meeting, Dikl added, "We do not subscribe to taking something from you and then returning it. We would like a Palestinian state as it is in our interest. We cannot sympathise with the logic of 'return what was taken'."

After Ahmed Qurei's attempts during a later meeting failed to persuade the Israelis to return to the starting point, Palestinians became increasingly convinced of the need to rely on the internationalisation of Jerusalem.

On 31 August, 2008 PA President Mahmoud Abbas received a verbal proposal from Olmert which called for the formation of a committee to determine the fate of the Noble Sanctuary. The committee was to consist of the United States, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia; however it would not possess the power to force either Israel or the Palestinian Authority to adhere to its recommendations.

## An international committee for Jerusalem

Records of the negotiations obtained by Al Jazeera show that the Chief Palestinian Negotiator, Saeb Erekat, proposed an unprecedented solution to divide Jerusalem and its holy sites. The minutes of the meetings held at the headquarters of the US State Department show that Erekat was willing to relinquish Al-Haram al-Sharif and give it over to an international committee in exchange for sovereignty over larger areas of the Old City of Jerusalem.

Thus, at a meeting on 21 October 2009 with the American envoy to the Middle East George Mitchell, his deputy David Hale and the legal advisor to the US Department of State Jonathan Schwartz, Erekat told the Americans about his “innovative” solution of dividing the Old City of Jerusalem.

Erekat proposed to stick to the so-called Clinton parameters; a plan presented by former US President Bill Clinton after the failure of the Camp David Accords in 2000 which requires conditional agreement on the illegal settlement blocs, as well the exchange of land between the pre-1967 territory and the West Bank.

As before, Erekat seemed willing to accept the international committee, even though the United States lacks a historic understanding of the Noble Sanctuary issue and is the closest and most sincere of Israel's allies. Worst still, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan would all use the committee for their own interests and each of them, particularly Saudi Arabia, has an interest in the situation of the Haram. Since the onset of its initiative for peace in the Middle East in 2002 which was adopted by the Arab League, Israel and the Palestinian cause have been at the heart of Saudi Arabia's concerns.

At the end of the Annapolis talks on 2 December 2008, just weeks before the Gaza War, Erekat told the US Assistant Secretary of state David Welch that, “The greatest concern for Saudi Arabia is Jerusalem and not land or area exchange. For them, Jerusalem is the Haram.”

It may be inferred from the indicators put forward regarding the question of Jerusalem, that there is an international Arab initiative to “internationalise” East Jerusalem. This is in the knowledge that the 1947 UN General Assembly resolution to divide Palestine called for the internationalisation of the whole of Jerusalem, both East and West. Arab acceptance of the internationalisation of East Jerusalem alone contravenes international law as this Arab trend allows for West Jerusalem to remain under Israeli control while the UN resolution stipulates its internationalisation.

Conflict broke out between Jordan on the one hand and Egypt and Saudi Arabia on the other over the renovation of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, both within the Noble Sanctuary. This clarified that the Saudi and Jordanian stance prior to the Arab Spring was moving toward the internationalisation of these holy sites provided that the Muslims are allowed to manage them.

## The agreement between Abbas and King Abdullah

The agreement signed between King Abdullah II of Jordan and the Palestinian President was a text consisting of an introduction and three articles. It was constructed in a similar manner to a legal text and was entitled “Cooperation for



the protection of Jerusalem and the holy sites". It provided for three things: the guardianship of the King of Jordan over Jerusalem and the holy sites, particularly Al-Haram al-Shariff, which was considered an extension of Jordanian guardianship and protection over Jerusalem since the pledge of allegiance to King Hussein bin Ali was taken in 1924 to protect, maintain and renovate the holy sites of Jerusalem. This role was to be continued by the monarch of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, among Sharif Hussein bin Ali's descendants, who has the right to supervise and manage endowment property in Jerusalem in accordance with the laws of the Kingdom of Jordan. The agreement also included clear recognition by the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Palestinian Authority of King Abdullah II as the sole legal representative of the Palestinian people. These procedures are temporary until Palestine is able to manage its own affairs, considering that Jerusalem is Palestinian territory.

This agreement was limited to the religious sanctities located on an area of 144,000 square metres and, as stated in the texts, was intended to confirm the disengagement resolution between the West Bank and Jordan in 1988 while leaving in place Jordan's right to protect the religious sanctities and the Wadi Araba reconciliation agreement between Jordan and Israel signed on 26 October, 1994.

It contained an article that stipulated the role of Jordan in Jerusalem as follows:

"That Israel respects the specific current role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in regard of the Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem, and once final status negotiations are convened, it will give higher priority to the historic Jordanian role in these places."

In trying to understand the goal of this agreement and sign it at this particular time, numerous assumptions and conflicting readings were made of it; eg. The Palestinian Authority considered that the agreement had been made to establish an existing reality and confirm the right of the Hashemites to protect the religious, Islamic and Christian, sanctities in the city of Jerusalem.

The Jordanian Foreign Minister expressed official Jordanian understanding of the agreement as it having been made between the King and the Palestinian Authority; that the King signed it in his personal capacity as well as his capacity as heir to Sharif Hussein bin Ali as custodian of the holy places. This contradicts the provisions of the convention and the preface contained therein which confirm that the agreement was signed between the Jordanian monarch in his capacity as king, and the Palestinian president in his capacity as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, the head of the State of Palestine and the head of both the executive committee of the PLO and the Palestinian Authority.

Other parties view the agreement as a reaction to Jordanian discomfort at Qatari attempts to get itself involved with the Jerusalem file during the most recent Arab Summit Conference when it decided to create a Jerusalem support fund to which it donated a quarter of a billion dollars.

According to the views of local and international parties, analysts and politicians, the agreement was intended to pave the way toward, and accelerate the establishment of a federal system between Jordan and the West Bank. It was also intended to be a formula to resolve the Palestinian question. As such, in remarks made to Atlantic

magazine, the Jordanian king was of the opinion that the opportunity to establish a Palestinian state had almost dissipated, and in the words of the late Colonel Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, the solution was now the state of "Isratine". This is an option rejected by Israel as it seeks to secure Arab recognition of its Jewishness rendering the choice of a federation between the West Bank and Jordan the only practical solution available.

## Conclusion

A few of the points mentioned above related to both the concept of guardianship and the last agreement signed between the Palestinian president and the Jordanian King warrant clarification.

1. When you consider the pledge given by both the popular and official delegations sent from the Palestinian people to Hussein bin Ali, it was a pledge of allegiance to the Islamic Caliphate and didn't refer to his guardianship or a pledge over the holy sites of Jerusalem. This pledge of allegiance to the Islamic Caliphate ended with his exile to Cyprus and the people of the Hijaz swearing allegiance to Abdul-Aziz bin Saud as their monarch.

If we assume that they pledged allegiance in regard to the holy sites, then allegiance cannot be inherited – neither democratically nor according to the Shariah.

2. Why was this agreement made at this point; what were the reasons for it? Particularly given that this announcement was made on the heels of Obama's visit to the region, and on the eve of US Secretary of State John Kerry's recent visit promising the resumption of settlement negotiations rather than a just solution or peace, and declaring his economic peace which ignores Jerusalem and its situation.

3. There is a question over whether Mahmoud Abbas has the authority to sign such an agreement in his capacity as president of the Palestinian Authority, which does not hold sovereignty over the occupied Palestinian territories to include Jerusalem. If this is the case, then one who does not possess a thing cannot grant it to another; one who does not possess sovereignty cannot concede it on the behalf of others. Even if it is religious sovereignty and the end justifies the means or it has the consent of all parties including the US, Israel and the Arabs, if it aims at the Palestinians making an early waiver of their right to sovereignty over Jerusalem it is not acceptable.

4. The introduction of Jordan as a party to the equation means the effective curtailment and marginalisation of the Palestinian role and detracts from the sole right of the Palestine Liberation Organisation to represent the Palestinian people and demand full Palestinian national rights. The introduction of the Jordanian government onto the negotiations circuit means that there is more than one party besides the Palestinians negotiating with the Israelis.

From this, the danger of conceding sovereignty over the holy places becomes apparent, because it gives others the legitimacy in place of those who possess the right (the Palestinian side) to play roles which may not be consistent with Palestinian national goals and aspirations.

This is particularly so given that the agreement on guardianship over the holy places in Jerusalem is completely consistent with what is stated in the Wadi Araba Convention, and as such cannot be compatible with Palestinian interests. The text of the Wadi Araba Agreement in which Jordan accepts recognition of the state of Israel in return for its role of supervising the holy sites in Jerusalem itself represents implicit Jordanian recognition of Israeli sovereignty over Arab Jerusalem.

5. In disregard of agreements and international laws relating to Jerusalem, Israel has not changed its stance on the city of Jerusalem and continues to consider it the eternal and undivided capital of Israel which is not subject to negotiations, concessions or mutual understandings with any party around it. The Israelis have made significant strides in the Judaisation of the holy city and have surrounded it with the Apartheid Wall which isolates large swathes of the West Bank and eliminates the last hopes for possibilities of establishing a Palestinian state on this portion of the West Bank or the Gaza Strip.

6. From this, the Zionist state has realised that there are militant Palestinian forces like Hamas who will continue to make demands and to discuss Jerusalem and al-Aqsa and to raise issues and problems such as Islamic endowments and Islamic and Christian sanctities. As such, the Americans and Israelis have managed to extricate themselves from this difficult and thorny situation by symbolically opening the file on Jordanian guardianship over the religious sites under the framework of religious jurisdiction over portions of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in exchange for sharing revenue from visits to these sites between the Jordanians and Israelis with the smaller portion going to the Jordanians.

The legal and political situation that will entail the return of religious jurisdiction over Christian and Islamic sanctities in Jerusalem to Jordan will collapse Palestinian demands that claim Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state as long as it comes under the guardianship and official jurisdiction of King Abdullah II, servant of Al-Aqsa Mosque, and thus turn the page on the holy city and close one of the most important Palestinian case files.

In this way, some of the features of what may be called the new form of aggression against Jerusalem may be seen. Jerusalem is the title of the upcoming phase, and the liquidation of Palestinian rights in Jerusalem will be the entry point for the complete liquidation of the Palestinian cause. Similarly, the agreement on religious jurisdiction will be an entrance through which the Jordanian leadership will be given an active and overt role in determining the future of Jerusalem, and as such, the future and nature of any final agreement in general.

Opening of the door before an active and overt Jordanian role in negotiations over the occupied Palestinian territories may be the reason behind the guardianship agreement that other agreements which are now being prepared silently may follow. Jordanian trusteeship over the holy sites will render any agreement on the issue of Jerusalem a general agreement aimed at transforming Palestinian political rights in Jerusalem into religious rights for Jordan, and transforming Palestinian residents of Jerusalem into Jordanians. In this way, "Palestine" and the "Palestinians" will be completely removed from the Jerusalem equation at Arab hands. This will make the solution for Israel easier as it may restrict the Palestinian, Arab and Islamic rights in Jerusalem to the holy sites alone, and the political rights of the Palestinians in the rest of Jerusalem,

and will be able to give Arab residents of Jerusalem the description that Israel wants. The Israelis will sometimes describe them as Jordanians and as guests without political rights, and at other times as Israelis when the matter relates to taxes, building permits and possession arise. In the end, the bitter reality remains that no one will call them according to their original description of Palestinians. Jordan wants them to be Jordanian, and Israel wants them to be described as anything other than as Palestinians; their Jerusalemite Palestinian identity will be crushed.

As such, we stand before job sharing with serious political implications and the entrance is Jerusalem. In the Palestinian case this aims at circumventing the idea of sole Palestinian sovereignty over the Palestinian territories by dividing the task of sovereignty should it be located between more than one party. Job sharing is a developed form of self-governance and is the opposite of sovereignty and independence. The use of this terminology allows those who use it to avoid falling into the trap of names that may be inaccurate or whose nature it may be too early to resolve and descriptions such as federalism or confederation.

The question now is over where the role of the Jerusalem Committee, headed by the King of Morocco to halt the concessions and Judaisation of the holy city, lies. The committee was established within the framework of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to preserve the Arab identity of Jerusalem and its Islamic nature. In light of the increasing criticism of its timid performance, the Palestinian Ambassador has demanded that it activate its role to combat the danger of the Judaisation of the city and the violations perpetrated by Israel.

In addition, what is the role of the Arab people? Will they remain absent or will they be able to stand in the face of their rulers to stop what is being planned in secret to bring an end to the Palestinian cause in general and specifically the holy sites?

The thing that is feared the most is that plans such as the federal plan, job sharing or the alternative state are implemented through the administration of the rulers and not the people and their desires. People are not interested in facilitating the task of the Israeli occupation or the task of eliminating Palestinian national rights. Similarly, the Palestinians are unwilling, indeed unable, to implement the alternative homeland conspiracy. Those who are capable of this are the rulers and not the people.

Thus, hope hinges on the people expressing their commitment to their holy sites and that they will not be side-tracked by the internal problems of the state which schemes and plots conspiracies to liquidate the Palestinian cause. We now see some popular movements, such as the World Jerusalem March which will be held for the second year and will occur simultaneously in most countries around the world, mention the importance of the return of Jerusalem to its people and the mass rejection of Judaisation of the city. This year its launch coincided with the anniversary of the fall of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1967 in an attempt to remind the world of its responsibility toward the holy city.



**MEM** ●  
MIDDLE EAST M●NITOR