



Palestine Solidarity Alliance
United Against Apartheid Israel



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Defending Aqsa - A Current Political Perspective

Since time immemorial, Jerusalem has held significant political and religious status, as has the Al-Aqsa Compound, a site that has been a Muslim religious site of prayer for hundreds of years, recently experiencing a forceful contestation for 'divine' ownership by the Apartheid State of Israel and fundamentalist Jews alike. This claim emerged particularly in the aftermath of the Six-Day War of 1967.

The al-Aqsa Mosque is the third holiest site in Islam, and many sites of Islamic significance, including the Dome of the Rock, can be found in Jerusalem. It is believed to be the site from which the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) ascended to the heavens and met with God. In the contemporary era, however, the al-Aqsa Mosque and its surrounding compound have both taken on a dimension, which has been far more political than religious.

In the twentieth century, the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 carved up the Middle East with certain portions of the region falling to Britain, including Palestine, which then came to exist as a British Mandate. Under British control, Jewish settlements were erected in Jerusalem, a city that had previously only been home to Palestinians. Upon entering Jerusalem, Jewish settlers performed religious rituals, which ethnic Palestinians saw as a desecration of their holy site, and thus, in 1929, the first popular protest against the presence of settlers in Jerusalem began. Many more demonstrations against incoming settlers occurred while Palestine was under British rule, but British forces suppressed a majority of these soon after they began.

In 1947, when the Balfour Declaration came to fruition and Britain handed Palestine over to Jewish settlers, Jerusalem was put under international control, a process that was overseen by the United Nations. This, however, did not hinder Jewish settlers, who continued to make their way to Jerusalem, displacing Palestinians as they did so. By 1949, 750 000 Palestinians had been expelled from their homeland in what became known as *al-Nakba* (the catastrophe) and Jewish settlers seized control over a majority of Historic Palestine, creating the State of Israel as per Zionist aspirations.

By 1967, the number of Jewish settlers in Palestine grew exponentially, and thus began the Six-Day War, which was fought between Israel and neighbouring Arab states who were sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. The war lasted only a few days, and by the end of it, Israel used brute force and sophisticated weaponry to defeat the Arab states and illegally capture swathes of land in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights in Syria. Until today, Israel illegitimately occupies these territories, in blatant contravention of international law.

Since 1967, East Jerusalem, and the al-Aqsa Compound in particular, have been the sites of Palestinian resistance in the face of Israeli apartheid. A remarkable instance of this was that of the al-Aqsa Intifada, also known as the Second Intifada, which took place in 2005 when Ariel Sharon, the Prime Minister of Israel, entered the compound - something that had never before been done by an Israeli Politician. His visit to the holy site sparked massive protests

and served as a catalyst for acts of revolutionary Palestinian nationalism, which lasted for years, despite the Israel Defence Forces attempting to brutally stop them.

Over the years, Palestinians have resolutely defended al-Aqsa against settlers and soldiers alike, using every tactic of resistance available to them, from popular to organised, and violent to nonviolent. On multiple occasions, Israelis have attempted to enter the compound and the Mosque for an array of reasons and have often been unsuccessful. Their failure can be attributed to the many Palestinians who have fiercely guarded al-Aqsa against invaders.

One of the most prolific attacks against al-Aqsa took place in 1969 when an Israeli-Australian settler attempted to set fire to the Mosque. The fire set alight the facades of al-Aqsa, portions of its ceilings and floors, as well as ornaments in the Mosque and copies of the holy Quran. This was one of the most audacious and cruel attacks by an Israeli settler and 1500 square metres of al-Aqsa Mosque were burnt beyond repair. This instance of arson gave rise to resistance from thousands of Palestinians who protested the brazen act and called for the protection of the al-Aqsa compound from right-wing settlers.

In 2022, tensions soared in Palestine after Israel killed dozens of Palestinians in January and February. This led to sporadic bouts of Palestinian resistance sprouting up not only in Jerusalem, but also across the country. In Ramadan, Palestinians protested around the al-Aqsa compound, waving flags and chanting for freedom. These actions were seen as aggressive by Israeli forces, who responded with stun grenades and tear gas prior to evacuating demonstrators and shutting the doors of the Mosque. Some Palestinian protestors found themselves barricaded in al-Aqsa Mosque overnight and violently evacuated them the next morning. Some 50 Palestinians were injured in the attack and close to 500 Palestinians, including minors, were arrested for fighting to defend al-Aqsa.

The al-Aqsa Compound has been a site of turmoil, particularly over the course of the twentieth century. Illegally occupied by Israel, East Jerusalem has become a city of strife where Israeli soldiers roam freely and Palestinians are routinely attacked and barred from entering the Al-Aqsa compound.

With the backing of the United States and the European Union as well as others, Israel has extended its apartheid policies and brutal occupation of Palestine. This is evident in Jerusalem, where Israeli politicians and settlers act daily and with impunity to frustrate and to disrupt the lives of Palestinians who have been living for centuries in this holy city. There is no respect shown for any other faith by the Jewish settlers and Israeli military forces, as their objective is to unlawfully claim al-Aqsa to build a Jewish temple and to ethnically cleanse Jerusalem of all who are not Jewish.

Israeli soldiers and right wing Jewish fundamentalist politicians have been found desecrating the site and breaking age-old agreements by allowing Jewish settlers to enter freely and pray in the compound, despite the illegitimacy of these actions.

As the PSA, we strongly commit to continue to strive for the liberation of Al-Aqsa, Jerusalem and all of Palestine. We call on all who love Freedom and Human Rights and respect the dignity of our holy sites to join us in our solidarity work, to defend Aqsa and all Muslim and Christian religious sites across the indigenous lands of Palestine.

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