

THE TEMPLE MOUNT

By Carl Doerner

Haram al-Sharif (the Temple Mount), near the edge of the history-burdened, stone walled Old City of East Jerusalem, has increasingly become the anvil upon which Jews and Palestinians shape their swords. At its center is the Dome of the Rock, a gold-crowned 7th Century Muslim shrine. One of its retaining walls is sacred to Jews (the Western Wall where Jews come to pray). These ancient walls overlook a site sacred to Christians, the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed the night before his crucifixion. These historic, sacred sites are part of the municipality of divided Jerusalem, home to some 497,000 Jews, 281,000 Muslims and 14,000 Christians. Israelis are vigorously trying to rid Jerusalem of longtime Christian and Muslim Palestinian residents. Israeli encroachments on the Muslim site are one element sharpening long-term Palestinian resentments.

The deeper history is that out of fear of Russia, the Ottoman Empire backed Germany in World War I. Their loss led to Britain being granted mandate control over that part of the Ottoman Empire that was Palestine. During the early part of the 20th Century many Jews made their way to Palestine. Holocaust survivors dramatically increased that number. The British Mandate ended in 1948 and 750,000 Palestinian residents were forced to flee. Under a UN partition plan the Jewish and Palestinian lands were of similar size. Jerusalem remained under UN administration.

Walking into Israel from Jordan in 1963, I wasn't even asked to present identification. A student of modern European history, I was quite sympathetic to this then utopian, socialist, agricultural country and its scarred newcomers. I was then unaware of the Palestinian expulsions.

The 1967 War permanently altered Israel's reach, character and posture. Winning in six days, Israel claimed and occupied the portion of Jordan, into which Palestinians had fled, particularly the west bank of the Jordan River. After that war, the U.S. perceived Israel as a powerful ally in its own desire for control of Mideast oil and began promoting armaments and providing aid, by now totaling over \$100-billion. As a result Israel has become the fourth largest distributor of arms in the world, with \$7-billion in annual revenue.

The Zionist dream of creating a "Greater Israel" in the occupied lands emerged, along with massive, illegal settlement on occupied land. Settlers now number 650,000. Israel's occupation - controlling the lives and fortunes of 4.4-million people - violates eight articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention. One graphic comparison we might consider is the 19th Century rush of settlers into our own West, then home to our First Americans. It is this Zionist expansion that blocks peaceful resolution!

The Palestinian grievances since October – which also includes settlers setting fire to a Palestinian home that killed three occupants - 28 Israelis and 199 Palestinians have been killed. What do these occupied people experience? Recent video records Israeli police warning, "People of Aida refugee camp, we are the occupation forces. You throw stones and we will hit you with gas until you all die, the children the youth, the old people. You will all die. We won't leave any of you alive."

Why are Palestinians willing to face death with their protests and assaults on Israelis? I think the answer can be posed with another question; how long can people

suffer abuse without rising up and attempting retaliation?

Osama bin Laden's 2002 "Letter to America" cited U.S. support for Israel as an al-Qaeda motive for the September 11 attacks. While the U.S stands alone among nations in its one-sided support of Israel and every other presidential candidate this season dedicates unswerving loyalty to Israel, Bernie Sanders alone exhibits the good sense to support both Israeli security and establishment of a viable Palestinian state. Knowing that ongoing suppression of the Palestinians is one of the central causes of Mideast conflict, he wisely chooses even-handedness in seeking a solution.

A viable Palestinian state wouldn't threaten Israel. Hostility grows from history - of expulsion, occupation and abuse. Launching missiles and suicide attacks are desperate moves by exhausted people. We cheered defying Russian or Chinese tanks in 1968 Prague and 1989 Tiananmen Square.

I'm taken aback when I realize the elderly Palestinians I encounter are not those expelled in 1948 but their children and grandchildren. What has living under long occupation been like? The Israeli government has demolished 50,000 homes since 1967, imprisons without trial, dumps garbage on Palestinian land, taxes residents without providing services and allocates 80% of scarce water to settlements. It restricts movement, imposes checkpoints, strip searches, and shoots rebellious youth – in short, disrespects and imprisons Palestinians. President Carter has examined circumstances under which Palestinians live, terming them "apartheid." Of course, Israel and the U.S. were robust supporters of South Africa's apartheid.

It is time for American discourse and actions regarding this conflict to be based on observable facts, and for both diplomacy and aid to reflect reality.