

Israel's Model of Political Despair in Jerusalem

By [Jonathan Cook](#)

Global Research, November 26, 2014

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#), [Religion](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Relations between Israelis and Palestinians have descended into a dangerous melee of tit-for-tat attacks and killings, with the violence of the past few weeks centred on Jerusalem. The city, claimed by Israel as its "undivided capital", has been torn apart by clashes between Israeli police and Palestinian residents since the summer, when 16-year-old Mohammed Abu Khdeir was burnt alive by Jewish extremists.

Subsequent attacks by Palestinians culminated last week in a shooting and stabbing spree by two cousins at a synagogue that killed four Jews and an Israeli policeman. In this atmosphere, both sides have warned that the political conflict is mutating into a religious one.

Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, cautioned that Israel's intensified efforts to extend its control over the Al Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City, including by imposing severe restrictions on Muslim worship, risked plunging the region into "a detrimental religious war."

Yoram Cohen, the head of Israel's Shin Bet intelligence service, concurred. He warned last week that Israel was stoking religious discord by encouraging Jews to pray at the site over rabbinical objections.

But despite these warnings, the Israeli government announced today it was drafting a law that would ban Muslim guards on the esplanade, making it yet easier for Jews to visit.

Government ministers, meanwhile, accused Abbas of religious "incitement" and masterminding the violence in Jerusalem.

Ari Shavit, an influential Israeli analyst, also blamed what he termed an emerging "holy war" not on oppressive Israeli policies, but on the spread of an Islamist extremism.

Shavit and other Israelis have preferred to overlook the obvious parallels between last week's killings and an even graver incident 20 years ago. Then, Baruch Goldstein, a Jewish settler, entered the Ibrahimi mosque in the West Bank city of Hebron in his Israeli army captain's uniform and opened fire on Muslim worshippers, killing 29 and wounding 125.

One can only wonder why the timeline for Shavit's holy war did not extend back to Goldstein's massacre, or include the waves of attacks, including arson, by settlers on Muslim and Christian places of worship ever since.

Israel's responses to these two massacres are more helpful in illuminating the fundamental causes of the recent surge in violence.

In Hebron, Palestinians rather than the settlers paid the price for Goldstein's slaughter. Israel divided the Ibrahimi mosque to create a Jewish prayer space and effectively shut down Hebron's commercial centre, displacing thousands of Palestinian residents.

Instead of pulling out of the settlers from the occupied territories following the massacre, Israel allowed their numbers to grow at record pace.

Although the anti-Arab Kach group Goldstein belonged to was outlawed, it has continued to operate openly in the settlements, including in Jerusalem. Goldstein's tomb, next to Hebron, is a site of pilgrimage for thousands of religious Jews.

Palestinians, not Israelis, are again the ones suffering, this time after last week's synagogue attack.

Israel has begun demolishing the homes of those involved in recent attacks, and is drafting laws to jail stone-throwers for up to 20 years and harshly penalise the parents of those too young to be jailed themselves.

On Sunday the interior minister revoked the Jerusalem residency of a Palestinian convicted of driving a suicide bomber into Tel Aviv 13 years ago – a prelude, according to prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to many more such revocations.

Israel is also preparing to relax gun controls to allow thousands more Israeli Jews to carry weapons at a time when Palestinian taxi and bus drivers in Jerusalem say they are being regularly assaulted. Last week a bus driver died in mysterious circumstances, which Palestinians suspect was a lynching.

It should be no surprise that Jerusalem is the eye of the storm. For more than a decade it has served as a laboratory for the Israeli right to experiment with a model of political despair designed to make Palestinians either submit or leave.

House demolitions for Palestinians and settlement building for Jews, brutal policing and the encouragement of crime as a way to recruit collaborators are happening faster and more aggressively in Jerusalem than anywhere else in the occupied territories.

Since the second intifada erupted in 2000, East Jerusalem has been a political orphan. Israel expelled the Palestinian Authority, and jailed or deported Hamas leaders as they tried to fill the vacuum. Since then, Palestinians in Jerusalem have been defenceless against Israel's intrigues.

Netanyahu and the right have made little secret of their wish to export a similar model to the West Bank, gradually eroding what control the PA still enjoys. But the spiralling violence in Jerusalem has exposed the paradox at the heart of their strategy.

Palestinian anger in the West Bank is every bit as intense as in Jerusalem but Abbas' security forces still have the will and, just barely, the upper hand to keep a lid on it.

In Jerusalem, on the other hand, protesters face off directly with Israeli police. Because the city lacks organised Palestinian groups, the security services have been unable to penetrate them with collaborators. Instead Israel has been caught off guard by unpredictable attacks as individual Palestinians reach their breaking point.

By refusing to recognise any Palestinian national claims in Jerusalem, Netanyahu has forced the population to recast the conflict in religious terms. Unable to identify politically with either Fatah or Hamas, Jerusalem's Palestinians have found powerful consolation in a religious struggle to counter the mounting threats to Al-Aqsa.

From this perspective, Netanyahu's continuing efforts to weaken and undermine Abbas and the PA appear strategically self-destructive. Without them, the West Bank will go the way of Jerusalem – an ever more unmanageable colonial conflict that risks heading towards religious conflagration.

Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His latest books are "Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His website is www.jonathan-cook.net.

A version of this article first appeared in the National, Abu Dhabi.

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Jonathan Cook](#), Global Research, 2014

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Jonathan Cook](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca